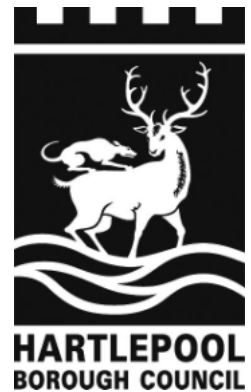


PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO DECISION SCHEDULE



Wednesday 3 August 2011

at 3.00 pm

in Committee Room C, Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Councillor J Brash, Cabinet Member responsible for Performance will consider the following items.

1. KEY DECISIONS

No items

2. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

- 2.1 Extended Career Grade Scheme for Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers (EHOs and TSOs) – *Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning) and Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer*

3. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- 3.1 Customer and Financial Services Section – Annual Reports 2010-11 – *Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer*

4. REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW OF SCRUTINY FORUMS

No items

5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (VARIATION) ORDER 2006

EXEMPT ITEMS

Under Section 100(A)(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 it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs referred to below of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006

6. EXEMPT KEY DECISIONS

No items

7. OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

- 7.1 Approval for Compulsory Redundancy (para 4) – *Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer*

PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO

Report to Portfolio Holder

3 August 2011



Report of: Assistant Director (Regeneration & Planning) and
Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer

Subject: EXTENDED CAREER GRADE SCHEME FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND TRADING
STANDARDS OFFICERS (EHOs and TSOs)

SUMMARY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To review the extended Career Grade Scheme for Environmental Health Officers (EHO's) and Trading Standards Officers (TSO's) and consider whether it should continue.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

The report reviews the application of the scheme, as agreed by the Portfolio Holder in September 2005, and updates the current position on the retention and recruitment of EHOs and TSOs within Public Protection.

3. RELEVANCE TO PORTFOLIO MEMBER

The Portfolio Holder is responsible for staff retention and reward matters under Performance Management.

4. TYPE OF DECISION

Non-Key.

5. DECISION MAKING ROUTE

Performance Portfolio Holder.

6. DECISION(S) REQUIRED

That the Portfolio Holder:

- a) Notes the position as regards the recruitment and retention of Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers.

- b) Retrospectively approve the continuation of the Extended Career Grade Scheme to the current date.
- b) Determines whether the scheme should continue.

Report of: Assistant Director Regeneration & Planning and Chief Customer and Workforce Officer

Subject: EXTENDED CAREER GRADE SCHEME FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND TRADING STANDARDS OFFICERS (EHOs and TSOs)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To review the extended Career Grade Scheme for Environmental Health Officers (EHO's) and Trading Standards Officers (TSO's) and consider whether it should continue.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Recruitment and retention of qualified EHOs and TSOs by the Council proved difficult for a number of years. There was a well documented and recognised national shortage of qualified Officers in both professions which compounded recruitment difficulties experienced by the Authority. In response to the ongoing difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified EHO's and TSO's, the Performance Management Portfolio Holder considered a report on 5 September 2005.
- 2.2 The Portfolio Holder approved a revised Career Grade Scheme (**Appendix A**) for all posts occupied by either qualified EHO's or TSO's – the scheme to be reviewed after 12 months in operation.
- 2.3 Reviews have been undertaken at relevant Portfolio Holder meetings held on 27 November 2006, 22 June 2007, 28 June 2008 and September 2009 and Portfolio Holder agreed to continue the Extended Career Grade Scheme for EHOs and TSOs and requested a further review be undertaken after September 2010.
- 2.4 Whilst the scheme was extended in September 2009 no further report on the scheme has been presented. The scheme therefore needs to be reviewed to determine should it continue or be withdrawn.
- 2.5 Since the introduction of the Scheme a robust corporate retention scheme has been agreed and included in the Single Status Agreement. It also made provision for Development Schemes to replace Career Grade schemes. The EHO/TSO scheme is not in accordance with the Single Status Agreement provision and continuation of an additional payments scheme in this format may represent an equal pay risk to the Authority should it continue.

3. CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 The staffing situation has not changed since September 2009
- 3.2 In January 2008 two qualified EHO's left the Authority. These vacant posts were advertised however only one suitable application was received. The applicant was appointed and commenced employment with the Authority at the end of May. The other post was re advertised and two applications were received. The successful candidate joined the authority in December 2008.
- 3.3 In April 2008 another Trading Standards Officer left the Authority, whilst this post was released by monitoring of vacancies panel it was decided to await the outcome of job evaluation and the review of this scheme before advertising. This post was filled in January 2009.
- 3.4 Another previously vacated TSO post was downgraded on a temporary basis and an existing trainee TSO undertook related duties whilst working towards their professional qualification of the Institute of Trading Standards Officers. It was initially hoped the trainee would gain professional status during 2009. However the officer decided to apply for a vacant trading standards technical officer post within the authority and not complete their training. The vacant Trading Standards Officer post was advertised in 2010 no applications were received from qualified officers, therefore a student has been appointed and is currently working towards her professional qualification.
- 3.5 The Council currently has three trainee posts on the establishment (two EHOs and one TSOs). Students have previously been a rich source of qualified staff to the authority, nevertheless three student posts is an unusually large commitment for a small authority. Due to the variances in timescales for Officers to successfully achieve professional status, there may be periods when more than two students are with the Council at any one time.

4. THE EXTENDED CAREER GRADE SCHEME

- 4.1 In relation to the scheme for EHOs and TSOs, of the 11 EHOs and TSOs employed by the Council, seven have successfully achieved entry to the scheme.
- 4.2 The scheme has demonstrated to existing and potential EHOs and TSOs the Council's commitment to attracting and retaining such professional staff. Appointees to posts in both disciplines since 2005 have cited the extended career grade as a significant incentive in applying for employment with Hartlepool Borough Council. In addition, the majority of existing staff have been retained although there have been possible financial advantages in moving to nearby authorities.
- 4.3 Pay bands for all posts have now been established following job evaluation.

5. NATIONAL AND LOCAL SITUATION ON EHO AND TSO POSTS

- 5.1 The national position of occupational shortages in local authorities is given in The Local Government Pay and Workforce Strategy Survey (November 2010). This report highlighted that 29% of local authorities were reporting recruitment problems for EHOs and 22% for TSOs. The report also outlines that 20% of authorities are offering market supplements to EHOs.
- 5.2 Enquiries of the other Tees Valley authorities reveal that two authorities currently have vacancies.
- 5.3 Whilst the number of posts advertised over the last year has reduced, nationally during the week of 13th July 2011 a total of 50 Environmental Health & Trading standards posts were advertised in the public & private sector.

EHO and TSO salaries within the north east have risen over recent years and a number offer market supplements in an attempt to recruit and retain qualified staff. The result of this and outcome of job evaluation is that pay grades offered at Hartlepool are mid range.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 In the current financial climate the need for market supplements has been re-evaluated as recruitment & retention of staff has improved.
- 6.2 Although there are problems to address there has been an improvement in the retention and recruitment of EHOs and TSOs since the Career Scheme was implemented in 2005. Whilst any improvement cannot be attributed solely to this scheme, it is possible that the scheme has had an effect.
- 6.3 The current scheme has provided the Council with good value for money. However it is not consistent with the Single Status Agreement and continuation of the scheme may represent an equal pay risk to the Council.
- 6.4 By omission the current scheme has not been extended or withdrawn it is therefore considered appropriate to seek a retrospective extension of the scheme to date.

7. PROPOSAL

- 7.1 Considering the current staffing levels, budget constraints and concerns regarding this scheme being inconsistent with the Single Status Agreement it is proposed that the scheme should be withdrawn.

- 7.2 In accordance with the Scheme Officers will continue to receive payments until the anniversary of being awarded the additional payment. This means that there will be a phasing out of the Scheme due to various anniversary dates.
- 7.3 This brings the existing scheme to an end and it will allow the authority to evaluate the effects on recruitment & retention of experienced qualified staff and if necessary, implement any additional measures that may be required to retain our experienced professional staff. It will also clarify the position for staff.

8. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 It is estimated that continuing payment to officers under the terms of the scheme to the 31st March 2012 will result in an additional cost of approximately £9,850.
- 8.2 Current costs are being met from the operational divisional budgets.
- 8.3 It is difficult to assess whether the Council will experience retention and recruitment difficulties as the employment market has changed as a result of the reduction in posts across local government nationally. There is a risk that the Council will not be able to retain and recruit experienced EHO's & TSO's if the Extended Career Grade Scheme is not continued or alternative arrangements consistent with the Single Status Agreement are not implemented appropriately.
- 8.4 The continuation of an additional payments scheme in this format may represent an equal pay risk to the Authority should it continue

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 Staff and their trade union representatives have been made aware that the scheme is under review and have expressed concerns if the scheme was withdrawn.
- 9.2 Formal comments have been requested and will be presented to the Portfolio Holder's meeting.

10. RECOMMENDATION

- 10.1 That the Portfolio Holder:
- a) Notes the position as regards the recruitment and retention of Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers.

- b) Retrospectively approve the continuation of the Extended Career Grade Scheme until 31st March 2011.
- c) Determines whether the scheme should continue.

11. CONTACT OFFICER

- 11.1 Sylvia Pinkney – Public Protection Manager
Regeneration & Neighbourhoods
Hartlepool Borough Council

Telephone Number: 5233315

Email: sylvia.pinkney@hartlepool.gov.uk

Appendix A

Extension of Career Grade Scheme for EHO's and TSO's

Procedure to be as per existing scheme. Extended scheme is available to all EHO's and TSO's employed in Public Protection. Up to four increments are available which are arranged in two groups, each containing two increments.

The first group of two increments is subject to the current "66% rule", ie, at least 66% of the criteria need to be satisfactorily achieved, including all those emboldened on the criteria lists (attached). However, all criteria must be satisfactorily achieved to progress to second stage of the extended scheme.

This is a voluntary scheme in which an EHO or TSO can "opt-in". In line with existing scheme staff should:

- (i) Inform their Line Manager of a desire to progress via the extended scheme
- (ii) Agree tasks/examples for demonstrating compliance of relative criteria with Line Manager.

The decision to progress through the scheme will be by the Head of Procurement, Property & Public Protection following interview by him or Section managers as appropriate and consideration of submitted portfolio evidence as per existing scheme.

Additional payments will be available as from the 1st of month following successful interview with Head of Procurement, Property & Public Protection (and will be backdated if required).

The extended scheme is a temporary arrangement to assist in the recruitment and retention of EHO's and TSO's and is subject to annual review by both the relevant Portfolio Holder and Head of Procurement, Property & Public Protection.

The annual review by the Portfolio Holder will occur as agreed. That review will result in either confirmation that the extended scheme will continue for at least another year or the withdrawal of the scheme.

Following any withdrawal of the scheme by the Portfolio Holder an officer will continue to be entitled to any previously agreed additional payment until the anniversary of successfully he/she obtaining/retaining the extended payment, subject to the following:

A review of whether an officer continues to meet the appropriate criteria will be carried out by the Head of Procurement, Property & Public Protection or Section Manager as appropriate on or about the anniversary of successfully obtaining entry to the extended scheme. Continuation of additional payment is subject to demonstrating continued compliance with relevant criteria at the annual review. Should an officer no longer meet the required criteria, additional payments will be withdrawn or reduced with effect from the month following the review.

GENERAL NOTES

- i) Only under exceptional circumstances will more than one application in any 6 month period be considered.
- ii) In order to help verify the case for progression, an officer will maintain a portfolio of relevant work activities to substantiate his/her case. The portfolio is to be made available at least two weeks prior to the interview assessment and be of sufficient detail to demonstrate continued compliance with relevant criteria.
- iii) An officer will be informed at the end of the interview or shortly afterwards, whether he/she has succeeded in progressing through the bar. The officer will be informed in writing of the reasons if he/she is unsuccessful.
- iv) Where an officer is aggrieved by a decision, he/she will have the right of appeal to the Director of Neighbourhood Services.

EHO/TSO Extended Career Grade SchemeSALARY GRADEGENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- SCP 41-42 inclusive
- Good sickness record (ie, below the current average absence rate for the Department during previous 12 month period)
 - **Maintain relevant CPD requirements as per CIEH or ITSA scheme**
 - **Demonstrate the highest level of job accountability and responsibility (including management of subordinate staff where appropriate)**
 - Carry out media interviews
 - Suggest and develop ideas likely to generate income or reduce costs
 - **Deputise for a more Senior Officer**
 - Develop projects, initiatives and procedures relevant to subject areas.

At least 66% of above responsibilities to be satisfactorily demonstrated including all those emboldened.

- SCP 43-44 inclusive
- **Obtain CIEH Chartered Status or follow APD route to achieve same level**
 - **Obtain a recognised specialist or management qualification (eg, Diploma in Acoustics and Noise Control, HSW, CMS, DMS, NEBOSH, etc)**
 - **Demonstrate continual achievement of appropriate divisional deadlines and targets for previous 12 month period**
 - **Good sickness record (as above)**
 - **Maintain relevant CPD requirements as per CIEH or ITSA scheme**

All the above responsibilities to be satisfactorily demonstrated.

EHO/TSO Managers Career Grade SchemeSALARY GRADEGENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

SCP 51-52 inclusive

- **Demonstrate satisfactory performance and quality of service of section for the preceding 12 months (eg, compliance with Service Plan requirements – if not achieved what actions have been taken by Manager, absence of or satisfactory conclusion of service complaints, etc)**
- **Demonstrate, over the previous two year period, satisfactory performance as a Manager (eg, satisfactory personal appraisals, staff appraisals completed on time and subsequently actioned, completion of risk assessments, absence management, resolution of staffing issues, etc)**
- Obtain a recognised management qualification (CMS, DMS or equivalent)
- **Maintain relevant CPD requirements as per CIEH or ITSA scheme**
- Deputise for the Head of Public Protection and Housing
- Good sickness record (ie, below the current average absence rate for the Department during previous 12 month period)
- **Demonstrate sound financial management and value for money services over previous 12 month period (eg, good knowledge of budget process, operating within agreed budget or sound justification of exceeding budget, etc)**

At least 66% of above responsibilities to be satisfactorily demonstrated including all those emboldened.

EHO/TSO Managers Career Grade Scheme

SALARY GRADE

GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

SCP 53-54 inclusive

- **Obtain CIEH Chartered status or follow APD route to achieve same level**
- **Demonstrate satisfactory and improving performance/quality of service over previous two year period (emphasis is on improving performance/quality – possible use of Hampshire Benchmarking scheme)**
- **Service provided by section to be in upper quartile of any relevant BVPI for previous year**
- **Maintain relevant CPD requirements as per CIEH or ITSA Scheme**
- **Good sickness record (ie, below the current average absence rate for the Department during previous 12 month period)**

All the above responsibilities to be satisfactorily demonstrated

Principal EHO/TSO Career Grade SchemeSTAGEGENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

SCP 46 - 47

- **Demonstrate satisfactory personal performance standards in appropriate subject areas during the preceeding 12 month period (This will include meeting timescales for accurate completion of returns, reports and information to more Senior Officers, meeting inspection targets, resolving complaints in a satisfactory manner and in accordance with Divisional, Departmental or Corporate Procedures)**
- **Submission of appropriate case study or studies and/or dissertation in relation to duties undertaken by officer demonstrating technical and professional knowledge appropriate for “excellent” Principal Officer**
- Deputise for Manager
- Good sickness record (ie, below the current average absence rate for the Department during previous 12 month period)
- **Maintain relevant CPD requirements as per CIEH or ITSA scheme**

At least 66% of above responsibilities to be satisfactorily demonstrated including all those emboldened.

SCP 48 - 49

- **Obtain CIEH Chartered Status or follow APD route to achieve same level**
- **Obtain recognised management qualification (CMS, DMS of equivalent)**
- **Demonstrate over the previous two year period, satisfactory personal performance as a manager (similar to Stage 1 but emphasis is on areas such as staff supervision [meetings, conflict resolution, absence management, resolution of underperforming staff, etc])**
- **Good sickness record (ie, below the current average absence rate for the Department during pervious 12 month period)**
- **Demonstrate, over the previous two year period, consistent achievement of Council, Government targets, PI's and deadlines within his/her personal control**
- **Maintain relevant CPD requirements as per CIEH or ITSA scheme**

All the above responsibilities to be satisfactorily demonstrated.

PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO

Report to Portfolio Holder

3 August 2011



Report of: Chief Customer & Workforce Services Officer

Subject: CUSTOMER & FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTION
- ANNUAL REPORTS 2010-11

SUMMARY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Portfolio Holder with an update on the various sections performance and key achievements during the year April 2010 to March 2011.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

The report contains background information on each of the service areas in the Customer & Financial Services Section of the Customer & Workforce Services Division together with details of performance and key achievements during 2010-11. For each of the following service areas, an Annual Report is included as an appendix, each of which also contain next year's targets and the key projects/issues for 2010-11:

- Diversity
- Hartlepool Connect
- Registration & Nationality
- Revenues & Benefits
- Shared Services

3. RELEVANCE TO PORTFOLIO MEMBER

The Portfolio Holder has responsibility for Customer & Financial Services under Performance.

4. TYPE OF DECISION

Non-key decision.

5. DECISION MAKING ROUTE

Performance Portfolio Holder meeting on 3 August 2011.

6. DECISION(S) REQUIRED

That the Portfolio Holder considers the report and provides any further comments prior to extracts of this information being published on our website and via the corporate Communications Team.

Report of: Chief Customer & Workforce Services Officer

Subject: CUSTOMER & FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTION
- ANNUAL REPORTS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Portfolio Holder with an update on the performance and key achievements for during the year April 2010 to March 2011 including the Annual Diversity Report.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Customer and Financial Services Section of the Customer and Workforce Services Division has four main sections each having a number of teams. The sections are:
- Awards & Benefits Security Services;
 - Customer & Support Services;
 - Revenues & Partnership Development Services, and
 - Shared Services.
- 2.2 Each section is working to achieve improved customer service via direct and indirect contact with customers. The section is also responsible for the Council's corporate transactional services. Another corporate function that is undertaken by the section relates to the diversity service.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Awards & Benefits Security Services

This section is responsible for the calculation, processing and payment of benefit claims and is also investigating the possibility of centralising all financial assessments to achieve efficiency savings and improve customer service by dealing with customers in one single contact. Duties also include supporting to customer groups and individuals to ensure that they are receiving all the benefits to which they are entitled together with initiatives to combat fraud. The Awards & Benefits Security Service performance information for 2010-11 is included within the Revenues and Benefits Annual Report attached at **Appendix A**.

3.2 Customer & Support Services

Hartlepool Connect, the Registration & Nationality Service (formerly the Register Office), Diversity and Performance & Development make up the Customer & Support Services section. The Council is working towards moving all initial customer contact to Hartlepool Connect and already provides access to a wide range of council services. The Hartlepool Connect Annual Report is enclosed at **Appendix B**. The Registration & Nationality Service Annual Report is enclosed at **Appendix C**. Equality and diversity are also managed within this section and the Equality and Diversity Annual Report is attached at **Appendix D**.

3.3 Revenues & Partnership Development Services

Arrangements for annual billing and collection of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rating are undertaken by the Revenues & Partnership Development Section. They are also responsible for Council's cashiering facility at the Civic Centre; the Council's income control arrangements and for developing new partnerships with other local authorities and service providers. The Revenues & Benefits Annual Report at Appendix A provides details of this section's performance during 2010-11.

3.4 Shared Services

The Shared Services Section manages the Council's insurance risks and Insurance Fund and is responsible for the Payroll functions for the Council, Cleveland Fire Authority (CFA) and the Regional Fire Control Centre. The section also ensures that arrangements are in place for the effective payment of suppliers to these three organisations, amounting to in excess of £100m a year. Technical taxation queries are handled by this section and a shared service arrangement covering sundry debt billing and recovery activity is currently being developed. It also manages Service Development across both Shared Services and Revenues and Benefits. The Shared Services Annual Report is attached at **Appendix E**.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Portfolio Holder considers the report and provides any further comments prior to extracts of this information being published on our website and via the corporate Communications Team.

5. CONTACT OFFICER

John Morton
Customer & Financial Services Officer
Email: john.morton@hartlepool.gov.uk
Telephone: 01429 523003

Revenues and Benefits Services

Annual Report 2010/11

1. WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

- 1.1 **Revenues Services** bill and collect Council Tax (£34m pa) and Business rates (£27m pa) and operate the Council's Cashiering Service at the Civic Centre which processed over 100,000 customer payments in 2010/11. This section also delivers annual billing for Darlington BC under a service agreement. The ethos of the service is to take a firm but fair approach to collecting debt, seeking wherever possible to avoid hardship.
- 1.2 **Benefits Services** are responsible for assessing and processing £50m of Housing and Council Tax Benefit annually. Benefits awards are strategically important to both the Council and the Borough, with approximately one in every three households within the Borough receiving some level of financial help with their council tax. The service aim is to provide, a timely and accurate benefit service, which is accessible by the whole community, respects every customer as an individual, listens to their views and continues to meet their changing needs and expectations.
- 1.2.1 In addition to processing benefit entitlement, the Council must ensure it maintains effective arrangements for receiving and investigating potential fraudulent abuses of the benefits system and imposing appropriate sanctions e.g. fines, cautions and prosecutions as a deterrent measure.

2. WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED

2.1. Revenues Services

- 2.1.1 By 31st March we had collected 97% of the Council Tax and 98.4% of the business rates due in 2010/11. The Council has maintained its positive collection levels in a difficult economic situation and importantly the council's long term collection rate still exceeds 99% which is the highest it has ever been.
- 2.1.2. The Council encourages payment of council tax by Direct Debit as this is one of the most economical ways to collect monies and is convenient for the public. By 31st March 2011, over 61% of those individuals that pay council tax have now opted to pay by direct debit.
- 2.1.3. A Self Service telephone service was introduced in March 2010 to empower customers with the ability to help themselves to obtain information, to make payments and to lodge service requests without

the need to speak to an officer. Consequently, this service has released front line staff so they have more time to deal with the more complicated enquiries and with those members of the public who need more personal help to resolve their enquiry. In 2010/11 over 24,500 calls were been handled by the new system.

2.1.4 Following an exercise to match council tax single person discount data with an external Credit Reference agency database, 200 awards of single person discount were removed from individuals thereby increasing the amount of council tax collected locally to support the council's budget.

2.1.5 In 2010/11, for business rates the Council:

- Awarded £1.9m of empty property relief;
- Awarded over £307,000 in additional small business rate relief that was announced in the March 2010 budget aimed at giving additional help to small businesses.

2.1.6 The council actively promotes and facilitates access to reductions in Council Tax particularly amongst those that meet qualifying criteria in terms of disability, carer or being severely mentally impaired. For 2010/11, 120 households benefited from 230 new award reductions thereby increasing by £66,000 the level of financial resources within households.

2.2 Benefits Services

2.2.1 Welfare Reform has contributed to a large part of planning, training and publicity during 2010-11. The Government have announced changes in the way housing benefit is calculated for Local Housing Allowance claims and increased non dependant deductions potentially affecting all case types.

2.2.2 Publicising these changes took place to ensure that households were able to prepare for any financial loss from April 2011 onwards, including a joint exercise with Housing Hartlepool, to include information with rent statements

2.2.3 Awareness raising of the proposed legislative changes was made with landlords via the Landlord Forum and the inclusion of leaflets with payment notifications.

2.2.4 Staff undertook training and awareness in preparation for the Department for Work and Pensions transfer of Incapacity Benefit/Income Support cases to Employment Support Allowance which affected over 3000 people in Hartlepool. This initiative will increase future workload within the Benefits service as changes to DWP benefit entitlement will impact on Housing / Council Tax benefit entitlement.

2.2.5 Benefits advice continued to be provided, to assist in encouraging and maximising uptake of benefits, across a number of locations including the Library Bus, College of Further Education, community events and surgeries.

2.2.6 The Benefits Service contributed to the Housing Academy, which is a joint venture with Housing Hartlepool, to increase knowledge and awareness and accessibility of the benefits system to Housing Hartlepool staff.

2.2.7 The Benefits Service now has a Health Advocate who promotes good health and well being of Benefits Staff recognising the importance of staff to the delivery of quality services.

2.2.8 The Benefits Service continues to take an active part in the Hartlepool Financial Inclusion Partnership (HFIP) and continues to give advice on opening appropriate bank accounts to facilitate the payment of Local Housing Allowance and encourage claimants to take financial responsibility in advance of the introduction of Universal Credit which is scheduled for 2013.

2.2.9 The Benefits Service continued to promote joint working with the Pension Service and two trained members of staff attended Laurel Gardens and Richard Court over a number of weeks to assist with the transition for new tenants.

2.2.10 The Mobile Service continues to signpost customers to promote uptake of benefits such Pension Credit, Tax Credits, Disability Living Allowance.

2.2.11 The Benefits and Revenues Services undertook a joint Service Delivery Options Review which identified savings of £108,000 which will be fully delivered in 2011/12.

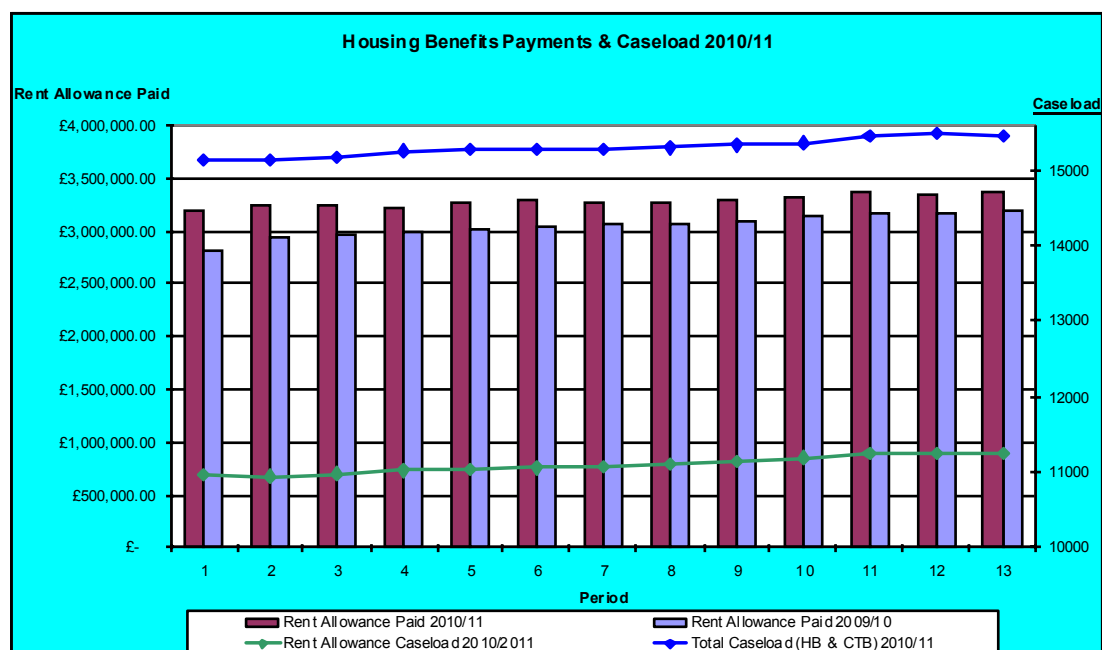
2.3 Free School Meals

2.3.1 The Benefits Service assumed the responsibility for processing and notifying Free Schools Meals (FSM) in April 2011 with a view to increasing uptake to maximise the pupil premium in Hartlepool. A further objective was to simplify and make it easier to claim FSM. The Council's Housing and Council Tax Benefit application form has been amended and now incorporates an application for Free School Meals. Furthermore, the Department for Work and Pensions have agreed to a pilot involving their collection of free school meals information when the public make claims for welfare benefits and passing that information on to the Council. This reduces costs by having a streamlined process with an improved customer journey. Promoting uptake of free school meals has also taken place within schools.

3. BENEFITS SERVICES KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2010-11

	Target 20010/11	Actual 2010/11
Time to process New Claims	24 days	21.2 days
Time to Process Changes in Circumstances	9 days	9.1 days
Right Time Indicator	12 days	10.57
Award of Annual Discretionary Housing Payments allocation	100%	100%

- 3.1 These key achievements have been delivered with reduced resources against a background of increasing workload linked to the recession as shown in the graph below. However, this graph does not reflect the significant number of claims received that do not qualify for an award of benefit.



4. BENEFIT COUNTER FRAUD ACTIVITY

- 4.1 The Council maximises the value of its fraud investigation resources by carrying out ongoing fraud awareness training to its processing staff to ensure that only those cases that merit investigation are referred to the team.

- 4.2 The Council also appreciates the importance of encouraging referrals from external sources and provides a Benefit Fraud Hotline Service to allow the public to report suspicions. An answer phone service is available outside of normal working hours and this number is actively promoted by the Council. In addition the council's website allows potential fraudulent abuse to be reported

4.3 **Benefit Fraud Sanctions Achieved 2010-11**

- 4.3.1 The Counter Fraud Team met the target for Sanctions as outlined in the table below .

	2010-11
Number of Cautions	59
Number of Administrative Penalties	14
Number of Prosecutions	13
Total	86

- 4.3.2 The Counter Fraud Team undertook a proactive exercise to identify customers who may have failed to notify cessation of Job Seekers Allowance (Contributions Based) resulting in 18 referrals for further investigation.
- 4.3.3 The Counter Fraud Team have targeted information provided by the Housing Benefit Matching Service and by National Fraud Initiative to obtain more accurate and specific referrals on which to act, and this has contributed to achieving a higher figure than the target set in sanctions.
- 4.3.4 The Counter Fraud Team will continue to use this approach in addition to in house referral, joint working with Department for Work and Pensions and referral from the fraud hotline, while the Department for Work and Pensions move towards setting up a Single Investigation Service in 2013.

5. **Revenues and Benefits Challenges/Priorities for 2011-12**

- Bridging the budget deficit for 2012/13 by undertaking a procurement exercise in relation to possible outsourcing Revenues and Benefits
- Maintaining and improving performance against a background of change and uncertainty, as the Government drives forward its agenda for Welfare Reform, which ultimately signals the end of the current Housing and Council Tax Benefit Scheme and during the current economic climate.

- New Claims processing in 20 days, Changes in Circumstance processing 9 days
- Achieve 87 Counter Fraud sanctions
- Advance notification of changes in local housing allowance, to assist customers to make financial provision.
- Introduction of ATLAS project involving electronic exchange of information from HMRC, which allows awards and changes to tax credits as they happen to be downloaded into the council's benefits system thereby reducing potential overpayments.
- Close monitoring of an enhanced Discretionary Housing Payment fund allocation to assist in alleviating hardship
- The Benefits Section will participate in Tell Us Once Corporate Change of Address (where customers notify the Council once on behalf of themselves and other household members) and seeks to obtain efficiencies by reduced customer contact, reduction in returned mail and improvement to the customer journey.
- Improve Council Tax Collection performance to 97.2%.
- Introduce council tax bill/benefit notification matching for ad hoc bills so that customers receive both documents in one envelope.
- Introduce a pilot whereby the Internal Bailiffs will take over the collection/enforcement of unpaid car parking fines.

Hartlepool Connect

Annual Report 2010-11





Hartlepool Connect

Annual Report 2010-11

1. Introduction

This is Hartlepool Connect's Annual Report for the year 2010-11. The purpose of this report is to set out how we have performed over the last twelve months, what our key highlights and achievements have been, together setting out our future plans and continuous improvement targets for this year (2011-12).

2. Background

Hartlepool Connect's aims and objectives remain as relevant today as when they were first introduced at the outset to centralise customer service delivery in 2004.

1. To provide a professional, customer focused, centralised contact centre (Hartlepool Connect) for the majority of inbound interactions for all departments within the Council and its relevant partners.
2. To provide cost efficiencies to the council by streamlining services with the use of technology, subject to resources, and appropriate sign posting to services and providing 'simple' services at first contact.
3. To introduce a performance management culture within Hartlepool Connect, providing regular management information to managers and ensuring targets and key performance indicators are met.
4. To promote Hartlepool Connect to Hartlepool citizens as the point of contact for the local authority and integrate with partners where appropriate.
5. To improve the customer experience and satisfaction levels regarding interaction with the Council.

Business Transformation

In addition to the above aims and objectives, the authority is continuing to progress a business transformation programme with emphasis placed upon enhanced service delivery, efficiencies and value for money.

The business transformation programme is underpinned by a number of workstreams. One of these workstreams is Customer Services, which forms close links with Hartlepool Connect.

Customer Services within Hartlepool Borough Council aims to:-

- Migrate further Council services to Hartlepool Connect;
- Encourage customers to self serve (channel shift to cheaper contact channels) and
- Minimise the amount of failure demand / avoidable contacts.

3. Performance 2010-11

3.1 Overview

Background

Hartlepool Connect is the customer service centre of Hartlepool Borough Council. It aims to resolve the majority of customer interactions at the first point of contact and to provide a helpful, professional and efficient service. Customers can access Council services in a one-stop-shop type approach, negating the need to be passed from department to department to have their enquiry dealt with.

The customer service environment is a complex area which relies heavily on the ability to collect and extract customer data. This data is used to enhance end to end service delivery and continuously improve the customer experience. Customer insight and intelligence enables Hartlepool Connect, together with back office services, to target resources to where it matters most to Hartlepool's residents and businesses.

Performance Management

Ultimately, providing excellent customer service is top of Hartlepool Connect's agenda, but in order to do so effectively and efficiently there are a number of underpinning elements that need to be in place. Hartlepool Connect's Performance Management Framework brings together these fundamental elements, such as recruitment, retention, training, development, performance and quality monitoring, which are measured and monitored by key performance indicators and local targets.

Technology

Effective technological solutions are at the heart of Hartlepool Connect's operation. It is reliant upon systems that can collect customer data, and currently we use a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database, Contact Centre telephony and switchboard systems, together with face to face queue management software.

Statistics

The above technology enables Hartlepool Connect to collect a wide range of performance and service statistics, as follows:-

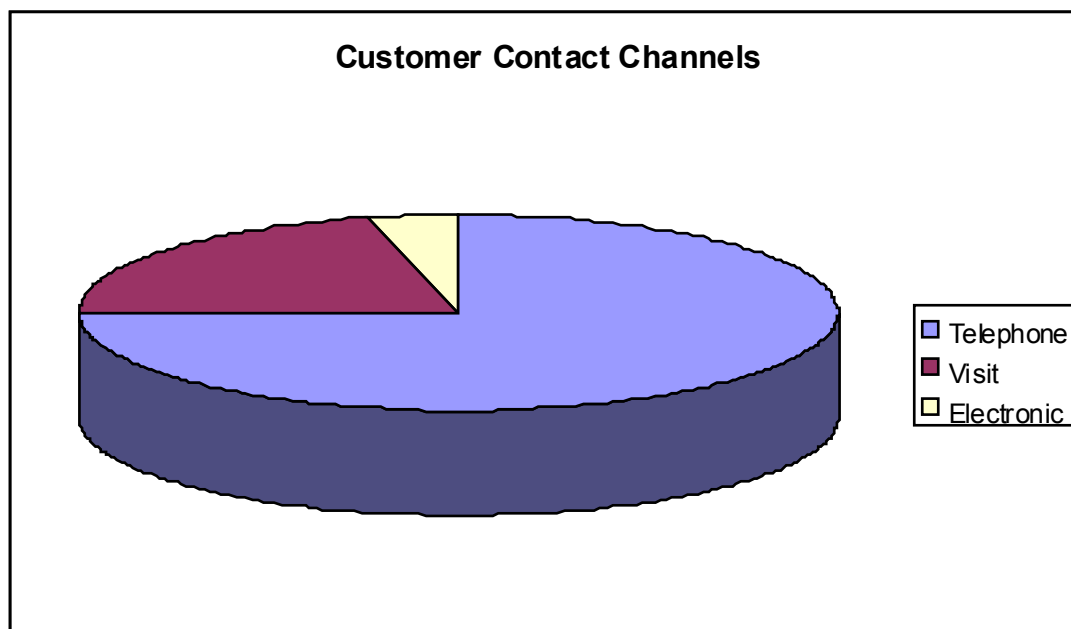
- Waiting Times
- Transaction Times
- Number of Service Requests / Quick Queries Logged
- Resolution at First Point of Contact
- Variation Demand / Service Growth
- Contact Channel
- Utilisation / Productivity
- Peaks – Site / Service

These statistics are analysed to improve customer service provision, by ensuring our service meets customer need and expectation. We also use these statistics to identify daily, weekly and monthly customer contact service trends, measure productivity, utilisation, effectively forecast demand and workforce plan.

3.2 Performance Out-turn

During the year, Hartlepool Connect handled **407,103** customer enquiries across the three primary contact channels.

A total of 75% (306,040) of customers contacted Hartlepool Connect by telephone, 21% (84,273) were personal visits and 4% (16,790) by e-communications.



High on our agenda was the reduction of customer wait and transaction times.

We have undertaken considerable analysis to establish service peaks and to ensure our service meets the needs of customers by efficiently staffing to meet demand.

Our statistics demonstrate that we have continued to maintain good customer wait times during the year, which is challenging in the current climate of service cuts.

We have developed a programme of continuous training and monitoring. This programme includes transaction time analysis, which helps us to identify training need or service process failure. We act upon our findings, and implement change where appropriate.

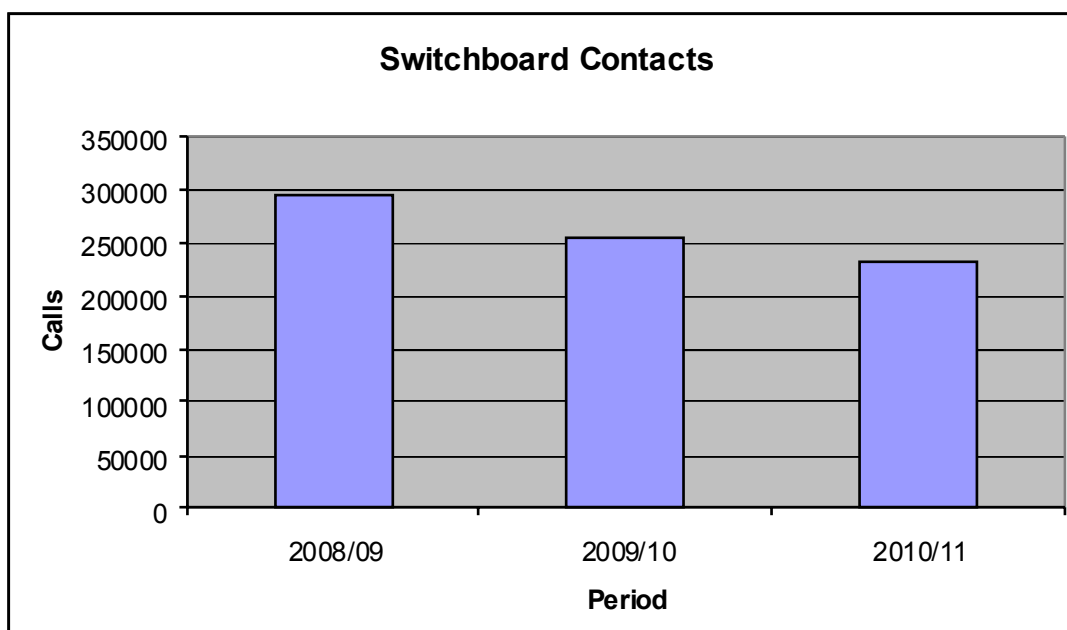
Telephony Performance

We handled over 306,000 telephone contacts during 20010-11. Hartlepool Connect's telephony is broken down into two areas – switchboard and contact centre.

Switchboard

Switchboard is the Council's main contact number – (01429) 266522 - and staff transfer callers to the correct internal extension.

The ongoing campaign to reduce switchboard calls continues to be effective. Statistics demonstrate that the number of handled contacts has significantly fallen from almost 300,000 callers in 2008/09 to just over 230,000 in 2010-11.



Our campaign has included:-

- Encouraging internal callers to use the intranet staff directory and external directories such as yell.com and bt.com.
- Assisting to produce the Council's A to Z of contacts which was sent to all households across the town, enabling customers to contact the right service area first time.
- Re-educating Housing Hartlepool customers of the correct number to call.
- Encouraging departments to publicise their direct extension numbers, in the event Hartlepool Connect is not required to provide assistance.

This campaign is enabling us to deal with external customers quickly who, on average, we answered in less than 12 seconds. Fewer customers are abandoning (or hanging up) their call before we answer. This has led to a fall from 12% of calls in 2009/10 to 11% during 2010/11.

Telephone Service

The Hartlepool Connect telephone service aims deals with a callers' enquiry at the first point of contact for services such as:-

- Bulky Household Waste Collections
- Environmental Services ie abandoned vehicles and flytipping
- Highways
- Horticulture
- Payments
- Parking Services
- Planning and Building Control
- Recruitment
- Refuse and Recycling

Contact numbers are broken down into five category types:-

Ask it	(01429) 523330
Apply for it	(01429) 523331
Book it	(01429) 523332
Report it	(01429) 523333
Pay for it	(01429) 523334

This strategy enables easy contact with the authority, and has been recognised as Compliance Plus by a Government Assessor in relation to our Customer Excellence Award.

Hartlepool Connect handled 75,278 telephone calls during 2010-11, which shows an increase in calls of 6% from the previous year. This increase in calls is due to the transfer of more Council services and providing customer service support for the national Tall Ships event.

Customer waiting times remained good, and on average calls were answered in less than 40 seconds.

The lost/abandonment (customers hanging up) rate remained below our target of 8%, with almost 50% of abandoned customers hanging up in less than 30 seconds. Customers also have the option to leave a message and we aim to call customers back the same day.

A total of 86% of customer enquiries were resolved at the first point of contact, which is in line with our target. We are continuing to work with back office services to improve this even further.

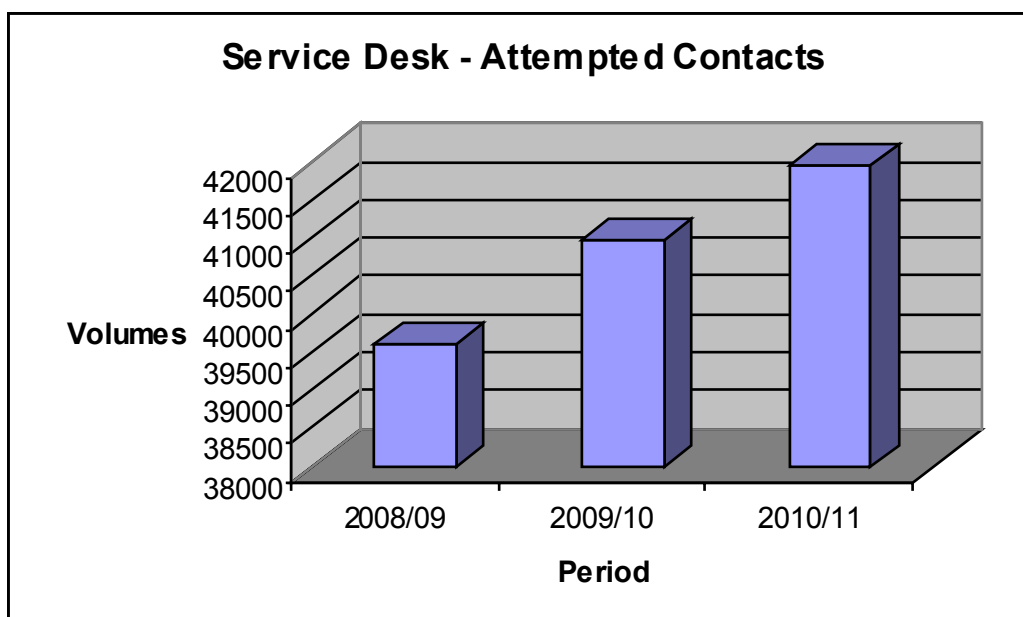
Visitors/Personal Callers

We dealt with over 84,000 personal callers in 2010-11. Hartlepool Connect manages the Civic Centre main reception area and handles a wide range of services such as:-

- Blue Badges
- Concessionary Fares
- Council Tax
- CRB Appointments
- Free School Meals
- Housing Benefits
- Information Point

Hartlepool Connect dealt with approximately 43,300 Information Point enquires. Customers reporting to Information Point receive services such as general council information, application forms, escorting to a meeting venue or receiving assistance with regard to which Council section can assist with their enquiry.

Hartlepool Connect Service Desk volumes have increased during the year with a total of 40,444 customers being dealt with by one of our Customer Service Assistants. Service Desk staff aim to deal with the complete customer transaction at the first point to contact.



As anticipated, both wait and transaction times have risen slightly, due to the transfer of more complex Housing Benefit enquiries, together with the Blue Badge service. These transfers have enabled Hartlepool Connect to deal with Housing Benefit applications right up to final assessment stage, together with setting up arrangements for Council Tax customers. In addition, Blue Badge customers can now receive their pass on the same day they make their application, providing they meet the necessary criteria. This same day customer promise is much quicker for our customers than the Council's previous process.

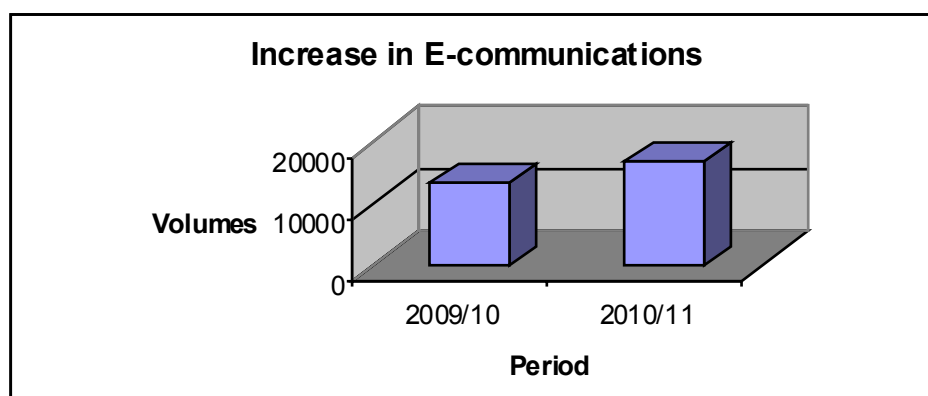
E-mails

Hartlepool Connect deals with customer e-communications that are sent to the following in-boxes:-

Customer Services
Diversity
Complaints

E-communications are continuing to increase, in accordance with the Council's channel migration strategy.

During the year Hartlepool Connect dealt with 16,790 e-mails / e-forms, showing an increase from 2009/10 (13,311).



A total of 89% of e-mails during 2010-11 were dealt with the same day, which exceeds our target response.

4. **Key Highlights and Achievements 2010-11**

Hartlepool Connect has had yet another extremely successful year. Our key highlights and achievements are summarised below.

- Retaining Customer Service Excellence, the Government standard, accreditation in October 2010 (see below). We are now an excellent 100% compliant with the standard.
- Providing customer services support for the national Tall Ships event in both the run up to the event and over the weekend.
- Overall utilisation across Hartlepool Connect was an excellent 70%. Contact Council (Cabinet Office) benchmarking analysis demonstrates that on average utilisation for unitary authorities is less than 60%. This places Hartlepool Connect in the upper quartile for benchmarking purposes.
- Implementation of a 24-hour automated payments line enabling customers to pay for Council services at their convenience.
- Integration of the Revenues and Benefits Counter Team for complex queries, strengthening the current Revenues and Benefits visitor service provided by Hartlepool Connect.
- Delivery of the Tees Valley In-work Support telephone line, providing customer service support across the Tees Valley.
- Integration of the Blue Badge, Business and Concessionary Permit Schemes.
- Production of a promotional DVD, accessed via the Council's web-site,
- Developing/reviewing on-line forms for the majority of services delivered by Hartlepool Connect, in accordance with the Council's Channel Migration Strategy.

5. **Service Plan and Improvement Targets 2011-12**

Service Plan

Hartlepool Connect's Service Plan has been developed and progress will be reported to the Performance Portfolio Holder on an annual basis.

Improvement Targets

Due to a reduction in our resources, we are to retain our current targets:-

Telephone	80% of telephone calls to be answered within 30 seconds
Visitors	80% of visitors to wait no longer than 8 minutes (without appointment)

E-communications	80% of e-communications to be dealt with the same day
First Point	80% of customer enquiries to be handled at the first point of contact (Contact Centre and Service Desk Enquiries)

Service Integration – Business Transformation Objective

The customer services element of further Council services are programmed over the next 12 months, including:-

1. Registration Service (Births, Deaths and Ceremonies)
2. Pest Control
3. Pollution
4. Housing Disrepair
5. Corporate Change of Address
6. Allotments

Failure Demand

Development and analysis of reports to establish the cause of repeat contacts, and to take action where applicable. This may involve process redesign or ensuring documentation is customer friendly.

Reduction in Application Forms

Hartlepool Connect will continue with its strategy to reduce application forms, where assessment can be carried out over the telephone.

Channel Migration Strategy

Hartlepool Connect will continue to move demand to more cost effective channels.

Customer Satisfaction

Increased consultation to identify how satisfied customers are with our service has been undertaken. Consultation methods have included surveys, attendance at consultation events and staff feedback.

A total of 90% of customers have rated Hartlepool Connect's service as either excellent or good.

Areas included within the consultation covers timeliness, delivery, accessibility and quality. In addition, consultation to establish what matters most to our customers has been carried out with short customer waiting times being most important.

HARTLEPOOL REGISTRATION SERVICE

ANNUAL REPORT 2010-11

BACKGROUND

The Registration Service provides the public with a comprehensive service for a mixture of statutory and non statutory services

Statutory:

- registering births, still births and deaths
- attestation of notices of civil marriage and civil partnership and for marriages in religious buildings.
- conducting and registering all civil marriages in the Borough, both in the Register Office and in various approved premises; and the registration of marriages in religious buildings.
- granting approval to suitable premises as venues for civil marriage and civil partnership and process applications for religious bodies for the certifying of buildings for worship and the registering of certified buildings for marriages.
- maintaining birth, death and marriage records from 1837 and issuing certified copies of these records on request
- the provision of Citizenship Ceremonies for all successful applicants living in the Borough

Non Statutory

- providing a nationality application checking service in partnership with the UK Border Agency and regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner
- providing advice and assistance to genealogists
- conducting civil ceremonies such as baby naming/welcome, and renewal of vows ceremonies

In addition to registering life events at the Register Office in the Civic Centre, occasionally, Registrars also attend to register events at the Hospital or in private homes. This is primarily in relation to still births or neo-natal deaths.

The Registration Service works in partnership with:

External bodies:

- HM Coroner,
- Medical practitioners,
- Surgeries,
- Hospitals and NHS Trusts and departments,
- Funeral Directors,
- the Clergy and Free Church Ministry,
- the Home Office,
- UK Borders Agency
- Identity and Passport Service
- General Register Office
- DWP

Internal bodies:

- Revenues and Benefits
- Electoral Registration
- Burials and Cremations Services

The service is part of Customer & Support Services Section of the Customer and Workforce Division and is supported by members of the Chief Executive's Department Support Services and Customer Services teams.

The statutory service is administered by the General Register Office (GRO), a Central Government Service. The head of service is the Registrar General.

Hartlepool participates in the North East Registration Regional Registrars Group where heads of service and managers from the 12 local authorities meet quarterly and appoint a representative to the National Registration Service Panel. The Group undertakes benchmarking and monitors national legislation and central government consultations. GRO participate in meetings. The Group has set up a dedicated Regional training body, NETworks, to which Hartlepool subscribes.

Hartlepool is currently a member of the Local Registration Services Association (LRSA) which filled the gap left when another local government organisation found it could not continue to support the local registration service.

PERFORMANCE

Statutory indicators will continue to be measured and benchmarked nationally. The national targets in relation to the main, high volume activities that are undertaken by the service are detailed below:

Performance Indicator	National Target	Outturn
% of births registered within 42 days	98%	99.5%
% of deaths registered within 5 days	95%	94%
% of customers seen within 10 minutes of appointment time	90%	94.9%

Local Performance indicators in relation to the Registration Service will be reviewed as part of the service delivery option review. This review will provide an opportunity to ensure that indicators are relevant and results can be used to enhance the customer experience.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2010-11

The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) that was undertaken in 2010-11 led to all service areas having to review their service planning initiatives. For the Registration Service, the review resulted in a relocation of the Register Office to the Civic Centre, which is Council's main administrative building. This has enabled the Council to achieve savings of approximately £28,300. The

service is now open for appointments on 5 full weekdays including Wednesday afternoons. Saturday morning appointments are no longer available.

Ceremonies continue to take place at the previous Register Office in the Willows Room. They will transfer to the Middlegate Room at the Borough Hall with effect from 1 July 2011.

The service has also implemented a new booking system for appointments that is being used corporately across the Council. The system has been developed to provide access online for customers to self-serve. The self-serve module will be implemented during 2011-12.

Payments have been moved to the Council's corporate payment system, PAYE.net. This payment system will also be used in future by customers who request copy certificates online.

In December 2010, the Chief Executive's Department Support Services team was created and 4 members of the Registration Team support staff transferred to that section. Efficiencies have been, and will continue to be achieved by consolidating activities. This team will also provide further resources to the Registration Team during peak periods eg over the summer months when more weddings take place and during holiday periods.

An internal audit was carried out during the final quarter of 2010-11. The auditor concluded that the control environment was adequately designed and established controls were consistently applied.

As part of the move to a new office location, an impact assessment was carried out to ensure that no customers are adversely affected by the relocation.

Other items that were included in last year's Service Plan were not concluded or fully progressed due to the changed priorities for service delivery that resulted from the CSR. The outstanding items have been reviewed to consider whether they are still relevant priorities for 2011-12.

KEY ISSUES & PROJECTS FOR 2011-12

- The Council has very challenging financial pressures to meet over the next 2 years and the service will be fully reviewed during 2011-12 as part of the Customer Services service delivery option (SDO) review. The SDO project will include
 - a review of all processes
 - a review of staffing levels
 - considering alternative delivery methods including transfer of activities to Hartlepool Connect, the Council's customer service centre, and
 - considering partnership working

- The Council has agreed to implement the Tell Us Once programme and expects to 'go live' with the service in November 2011. The service will be delivered as part of the birth and death registration process.
- The office move has resulted in the need for a new ceremonies room from July this year. The room is located in a different building and requires some minor works and redecoration to bring it up to the required standard. This work will be overseen by the Registration Services Manager.
- Effective marketing of services in relation to ceremonies will be reviewed in conjunction with the Events team in Community Services. Non-statutory services will continue to be offered such as naming ceremonies and renewal of vows.
- The Registration Service will continue to participate in the North East Registration Regional Registrars Group – as part of this group, staffing, numbers of activities performed and financial data are submitted annually for comparison with other registration districts in the North East. Data for 2010-11 has been submitted, will be reviewed and analysed as part of the SDO review process.
- The Council is developing a replacement for the software that is used to search records and produce copy certificates as support for this system from GRO will cease in July 2011.
- Legislation
Recent legislation due to be implemented includes:
 - Welfare Reform Act
 - Coroner and Death Certification legislation

Both will require significant procedural change and training. This training will be cascaded from GRO via the regional training group and the Hartlepool registration service's training officer.



EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ANNUAL REPORT 2010-2011



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INTRODUCTION

We want Hartlepool to be a place where no one experiences discrimination or disadvantage because of his or her age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin or faith. We believe that as a major service provider, employer and community leader we have an important role to play in making this happen.

BACKGROUND

A key piece of legislation that was introduced in 2010-11 was the Equality Act 2010, which came into effect in October 2010. It replaced and consolidated the raft of anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, and has implications for us as an employer and a service provider.

A key element of the changes in requirements is to reduce bureaucracy for local authorities without diluting the accountabilities to protect vulnerable 'protected groups'.

The Act contains a new integrated Public Sector Equality Duty, which requires all public bodies and private bodies that deliver a public function, to consider the needs of diverse groups when designing and delivering services. Under the Act, the Council must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Work has already been undertaken, and is continuing, to strengthen our focus on equality and ensure that we are compliant with the Public Sector Equality Duty. Moving forward a new framework has been defined involving:

- Departmental Diversity lead officers acting as drivers on diversity / equality issues
- Diversity responsibilities having been redefined / reconfigured into all line managers responsibilities and included within the council's competency framework for managers
- Using and engaging with regional and national resources and networks on diversity / equality issues.

Detailed guidance on how local authorities are expected to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 is not yet available. Until it is published, the existing policies and strategies relating to equality and diversity are still relevant and are available to service managers.

The Customer and Support Services Manager is the corporate lead for equality and diversity as part of her role as co-ordinator of the Corporate Customer Service Group. The postholder represents the authority on the regional Equalities Network group that is made up of the 12 north east local authorities and the regional fire and police authorities. The group works together to share best practice and expertise. They aim to achieve efficiencies by working jointly on key areas of development such as new legislation.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2010-11

The introduction of the Equality Act 2010 in October last year provided an opportunity to review and reconsider whether all the actions in the existing corporate Equality and Diversity action plan were still relevant. Progress was made by all 3 departments against many actions. Detailed below are the key achievements for 2010-11:-

- The Council reviewed services, policies and procedures in line with the Equality Act 2010 that came into force on the 1 Oct 2010
- The Council's budget was consulted on with all diverse communities and voluntary sectors
- The Asylum Seekers and the Refugees Drop in centre was established and the North East Refugee Service provided a presence each week to deal with their issues
- Chief Executive's Department
 - produced a DVD that demonstrates how customers with language barriers can contact Hartlepool Connect available via the Council's website
 - hosted a multi-faith conference in November 2010 during Interfaith week
- Regeneration and Neighbourhood Services Department
 - installed tactile crossings where there was a need identified by the public
 - Hartlepool Future Jobs Fund (FJF) remained the most successful initiative in the north east.
 - Young people's involvement in the consultative process of Neighbourhood Forums has been developed. A participatory budget of £8K was allocated and children from local schools and youth forums to consider and approve initiatives to address anti social behaviour in their area. Examples include re funding of the Saturday night Break Away Project, funding of team building exercise for Phoenix Funsters and taster activities for Rossmere Youth Club. The Central area has also funded the Rift Youth Project, Rift House cafe.
 - The Road Safety Team identified community based workers to deliver road safety projects to ethnic minorities. Resources were issued to the ethnic community groups and training was undertaken in schools. The ethnic communities training has now been incorporated into routine road safety activities in 2011.

- The Road Safety Team rolled out a Wheelchair/Mobility Scooter Education programme to adults at Warren Road Day Centre (similar to Whizz Kids programme). The Wheelchair User Road Safety Awareness Scheme has now been completed and additional training is delivered on an ad-hoc basis when required.
- Child and Adult Services Department
 - successfully delivered the Tall Ships Races 2010 in August 2010
 - continued to deliver the Government's Putting People First initiative.
 - the Aiming High project for children and young people with disabilities and their families continues was delivered. The aim of the project is to increase access to more universal services and increase choice.
 - the Educational Psychology Team used targeted mental health funds to train staff in school for early identification of mental health problems.

KEY ISSUES & PROJECTS FOR 2011-12

The task and finish group will review the public sector equalities duties and ensure that

- we pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations across all of the protected characteristics.
- demonstrate equality across all strands, including age, sexual orientation and religion or belief by building on the existing duties relating to disability, gender and race, and improves the coverage in relation to gender reassignment.
- Publish information (the requirements are still being finalized)
- Prepare and publish one or more objectives

An action plan, listed below, has been drawn up based on the limited guidance that is currently available. It is expected that further guidance on the new public sector equality duty will be available soon.

Actions we must take	How we need to do this	Lead person	When we need to do this
To state that the council will comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010	Include a statement in this year's corporate plan	Joanne Machers	2011/2012 plan
Look at information we have on our customers and communities, then how to fill any gaps in our information and maintaining the information so that managers can use this effectively. We need to ensure we collect data on all protected groups (gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age, disability, marriage and civil partnerships, race, gender)	Consultation groups info Review of database info across the organisation (GIS, CRM etc) Customer complaints information Management Academy	Christine Armstrong	Information needs to be published by 31.12.11 to comply with the Act.
Develop a guide which will clarify for managers their responsibilities in	Develop the SDO review guide which has	Joanne Machers and	ASAP

Actions we must take	How we need to do this	Lead person	When we need to do this
developing/changing their service and at which point engagement and data collection/analysis needs to be carried out. This also needs to show how policies and procedures have affected protected groups. Also, to include reference to commissioning and procurement services. Investigate the use of an electronic template based on the business continuity model which will provide a framework for undertaking the review	embedded the appreciation and completion of DIA's and INRA's. Use the Management Academy as a vehicle to update managers on the requirements of the Act	Andrew Atkin	
Engage with stakeholders and develop an engagement strategy	Corporate review of consultation and engagement arrangements	Andrew Atkin	
Members of the Strategic Customer Group to be fully briefed on the Equality Act requirements so that they can fulfil their monitoring and reporting role effectively	Discussion at Strategic Customer Group	Christine Armstrong	Next meeting
Review of procurement and commissioning information and documentation to ensure all services and any 3 rd parties are fully compliant with the Act		David Hart	30.6.2011
Research other local authority responses and adapt plan accordingly	Attend the NEREO E & D group	Christine Armstrong	Next meeting

Each department has nominated a member of their staff to represent them on a task and finish group that is a sub-group of the Strategic Customer Services Group. The representative will also be their Diversity Champion and will co-ordinate activities so that equality and diversity continues to be embedded within each service area.

In the meantime, service managers are responsible for making their services available to all members of the community, including businesses and visitors. Equality and diversity is included within the management competencies in the corporate Appraisal Scheme thus ensuring that service managers focus on ensuring that services are available to all.

SHARED SERVICES

ANNUAL REPORT 2010-11

INTRODUCTION

The Shared Services section manages activity in five separate function areas. These are;

1. Payroll
2. Insurance and Risk Management
3. Payments
4. Service Development
5. Debt Recovery

2010/11 has been a year of both development and consolidation following the volume of changes associated with the Business Transformation process. These included the establishment of distinct payroll, payments and recovery functions, preparation for the renewal of the Council's insurance covers, and the development of the HR/Payroll system. A brief summary of each of these areas performance for 2010/11 is included below.

1. Payroll

- 1.1. The **Payroll Service** unit is responsible for providing salary payments to employees of HBC, and provides a payroll service to schools, Cleveland Fire Authority and the North East Regional Fire Control Centre. The unit is also responsible for ensuring compliance with Tax, National Insurance and Pensions Regulations.
- 1.2. Highlights and achievements during 2010/11 are;
 - Gross payments to employees of circa £97.3m processed this year
 - Embedding of the payroll system and amended processes within the working practices of the Council, Cleveland Fire Authority and North-East Regional Fire Control.
 - Restructure and redundancy support provided throughout the year.
 - Support for the further development of the HR/Payroll system.
 - Ongoing equal pay settlements concluded.

2. Insurance / Risk Management

- 2.1. The **Insurance Services** unit is responsible for managing the Council's insurance arrangements, and assisting in the development and implementation of Risk Management strategies to manage the

Council's exposure to financial risk. The unit is also responsible for managing insurance claims.

2.2. Highlights and achievements during 2010/11 are;

- Joint insurance procurement exercise initiated with Redcar & Cleveland for all of the Councils insurance policies, ultimately producing recurring premium savings of £195k per annum.
- Continued increase in repudiation rates in response to further increases in volumes of claims received.
- 89% success rate of litigated cases, i.e. 8 of 9 cases taken to Court.
- Provision of insurance and risk management support to the Tall Ships event.
- Brougham school flood claim coordinated and significantly settled.
- Ongoing reviews of claims processes to improve the Council's defence of claims in particular HAVS claims within Neighbourhood Services
- Implementation of document encryption for external correspondence to insurers, loss adjusters, solicitors and brokers.
- Working from home policy fully implemented.

3. **Payments**

3.1. The **Payments Service** unit is responsible for providing payments to employees, suppliers and housing benefit recipients. The unit is also responsible for ensuring compliance with Construction Industry Tax (CIT) returns.

3.2. Highlights and achievements during 2010/11 are;

- Total payments of circa £202m paid including £43m of Housing Benefit rent allowances.
- Payment by BACS by volume increased to 81% for Housing Benefits (2009/10 – 77%). Payment by BACS by volume decreased to 92% for suppliers (2009/10 – 96%) however this is attributable to the expansion of the Council's Purchase card scheme which has expanded to 189 cardholders and spend of circa £1.48m (2009/10 - £1m).
- 93% of Housing benefit rent allowances by value are now paid by BACS.
- The proportion of creditor invoices paid within 30 days dropped to 80% (2009/10 – 92%). However this was owing to unprecedented sickness levels with long-term absences affecting a number of team members. Current 2011/12 to date figure is 90% and improving.
- Significant improvements in year-end arrangements supporting the closure process.

4. Service Development / Support

4.1. The **Service Development** unit is responsible for co-ordinating the development of the Shared Services Division's IT strategy and systems, and assisting with the roll out of key corporate IT projects. This unit has responsibility for the support and development of the Revenues and Benefits system iWorld, and the corporate HR/Payroll system Resourcelink.

4.2. Highlights and achievements during 2010/11 are;

- Employee Authentication System (EAS) rolled out and implemented throughout Revenues and Benefits providing significantly improved access controls to the DWP system and ensuring the security of customers' personal data.
- Implementation of Free School Meals software on iWorld including delivery of training to Benefits staff
- Subsidy return for 2009/10 completed unqualified and commended by District Audit
- New working procedures introduced and training completed for significant changes in HB/CTB legislation including Local Housing Allowance and Employment & Support Allowance (Incapacity Benefit) Reassessment Project.
- Coordinated DWP monthly caseloads and subsidy return enabling subsidy claims for circa £56.7m.
- Upgrades to iWorld system introduced, supported and system training provided across the Division.
- Resourcelink support for changes to establishment, sickness and employee procedures and reporting arrangements

5. Debt Recovery

5.1. The **Debt Recovery** unit is responsible for recovery and enforcement activity for all Council customer and housing benefit overpayment debts.

5.2. Highlights and achievements during 2010/11 are;

- Debt within all age categories over 30 days old has decreased in value terms as at 1st April with 2010/11 figure of £798k, (2009/10 - £1.163m)
- 97% of debt by value and 96% of debt by volume of all debt raised during 2009/10 collected by 1st July. (2009/10 97% and 95%)
- Operational arrangements successfully developed to reflect the structural and system changes to the team.

6. Challenges / Priorities 2011/12

- Continue to provide quality services whilst managing ongoing changes and meeting efficiency targets.
- Conclude outstanding equal pay claims.
- Introduce and develop HR elements of the Resourcelink system in accordance with the project plan developed with North Yorkshire County Council.
- Review insurance charging arrangements following completion of policy renewals.
- Develop arrangements for providing support services to Fire Brigade CIC Company.
- Develop arrangements for providing support services to academy schools.
- Develop transactional services activity in conjunction with the implementation of a centralised support services section for Chief Executive's department.