



Personnel Sub-Committee – 20 March 2017

Processing Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support claims on behalf of the Borough Council of Wellingborough

Purpose of report

To inform Members of the arrangement in place for processing Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims on behalf of the Borough Council of Wellingborough.

Attachment

None

1.0 Background

- 1.1 East Northamptonshire Council's (ENC) Benefits Service administers Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Support (CTS).
- 1.2 Approximately 5200 households within East Northamptonshire are in receipt of HB and/or CTS to help towards their rent and council tax costs.

2.0 The Borough Council of Wellingborough (BCW)

- 2.1 The resignation of a Benefits Assessor at BCW meant that they had a vacant post to fill (22 hours).
- 2.2 Experience has shown that it is very difficult to recruit to specialist posts such as this.
- 2.3 A further barrier is that there is an uncertainty around the future of Benefit departments due to the roll out of Universal Credit. The reduction in HB caseloads means that experienced Benefit Assessors are unlikely to move from one local authority to another.
- 2.4 Benefits departments now find themselves with very limited options when trying to fill vacant posts, one of which it to use costly recruitment agency workers.
- 2.5 Due to the position BCW found themselves in they made an approach to ENC with regards to processing HB and CTS claims on their behalf.

3.0 ENC position

- 3.1 At present the Benefits Service has a full complement of staff; other than annual leave, there are no other planned absences e.g. sick or maternity leave.
- 3.2 The team is performing above target (both locally and nationally) with regards to the speed in which they are processing HB/CTS new claims and changes in circumstances.
- 3.3 Due to the above factors management took the decision to process HB/CTS claims on behalf of BCW.
- 3.4 Initially one ENC Benefit Assessor will undertake this work; this may change in the future once the arrangement has been tried and tested.

4.0 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

4.1 An MoU has been signed by both parties and represents the basis on which ENC and BCW share usage of 'the employee'.

4.2 The main points from the MoU are:

- The employee commenced the role on 15 February 2017 and will continue in this role until either BCW no longer requires assistance or ENC can no longer provide it.
- The employee will be based at the Cedar Drive offices of ENC; however, one morning per week will be based at the Tithe Barn Road offices of BCW – the shared ICT service with BCW has made this a simple process with regards to remote accessing BCW systems.
- The employee will work for 37 hours per week, consisting of around 22 hours per week for BCW and 15 hours per week for ENC. The hours for either Council may vary depending on the needs of each Council.
- The employee will remain an employee of ENC for the duration of the arrangement.
- The arrangement can be terminated upon one week's notice by either Council.
- ENC will invoice BCW on a monthly basis for the number of hours worked and the associated travel costs.

5.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

5.1 This report is purely for information and requires no decision from the Sub-Committee. There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.0 Risk Management

7.1 There is a risk that, due to unforeseen circumstances e.g. sick leave or increase in incoming work, ENC may not have the capacity to provide assistance. The MoU addresses this risk (see 4.2.) and the risk is to BCW rather than ENC.

8.0 Resource and Financial Implications

8.1 The arrangement will generate income of around £14K per annum, and travel costs will be covered by BCW.

9.0 Constitutional Implications

9.1 There are no constitutional implications arising from this report.

10.0 Customer Service Implications

10.1 New and existing HB/CTS customers will not be impacted as a result of this arrangement. The MoU clearly states that ENC will only provide assistance when they have the capacity to do so.

11.0 Corporate Outcomes

11.1 The Corporate Outcomes are:

- Good Value for Money – increased income
- Effective Management – good use of resources

12.0 Recommendation

12.1 It is recommended that this report be received and noted.

Legal	Power:				
	Other considerations:				
Background Papers:					
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Date: 7 March 2017					
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