

Report to: Joint Consultative and Safety Committee (JCSC)

Subject: Staffing Report – Revenues Services

Date: 23rd October 2012.

Author: Corporate Director

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To recommend staffing structure changes that will deliver services in an appropriate and effective way, recognising the changing demands that are anticipated and which will also result in efficiency savings.

2. BACKGROUND

Over the next few years Revenues Services will be required to deal with the most significant fundamental changes to its statutory roles regarding Housing and Council Tax Benefits, Council Tax and Business Rates since these schemes began over 20 years ago.

The Government has embarked upon a programme of Welfare Reform that will see the abolition of Housing Benefit with a new Housing Cost support to be administered by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) under the new Universal Credit, the replacement of Council Tax Benefit by a Localised Council Tax Support Scheme and changes to Business Rates funding under the new Retention scheme.

In addition to this there is the on-going need to deliver improved services at less cost. Extensive benchmarking of the Revenues Service shows that Gedling delivers high performance at average costs. The challenge is to maintain this level of performance at a cost base that is comparable with the best in both public and private sector provision.

This report explains how Revenues Services needs to restructure in order to accommodate future changes particularly in respect of the anticipated reduced staffing requirements driven by Central Government funding through the Benefits subsidy arrangements.

The restructure is aimed to protect front-line service delivery and streamline customer contact with any reductions mainly concerning managerial and administrative resources. Overall it is anticipated that services will be maintained or improved and significant ongoing efficiencies delivered.

3. PROPOSAL

In general terms the proposals in this report are to restructure the management posts in Revenues Services to better align functions in preparation for the forthcoming statutory regulation changes as mentioned above. This will require a reduction in expensive managerial resources to concentrate on front-line services given the changes we face and allow us a better chance of making more savings further down the line, if required.

We have worked with private sector advisors who have suggested that savings in the region of £100,000 to £150,000 could be made by outsourcing the whole of the Council's Revenues Service. Our intention is to be able to compete with the best of the private sector. The proposals will maintain service levels and performance standards but without the need for outsourcing and the subsequent potential for service disruption and loss of control.

It is felt that the statutory and technical reforms changes will be the dominant driving force over the next few years and therefore the section will require more emphasis on technical expertise in order to successfully respond to and implement these reforms.

The changes to the Council's management structure from Heads of Service to Corporate Directors reaffirmed Service Managers posts as operational heads as distinct from the corporate (and non-departmental) roles of the new Directors posts. As a result, the Revenues Services Manager's job description and person specification has already been amended to reflect this arrangement.

Similarly, it is felt that Revenues Services will be better able to respond to future challenges with greater emphasis on more professional and technical support from its middle managers and team leaders in the two foremost sections of Revenues Services - Housing Benefits and Local Taxation - and it will be these sections that will drive the service forward over the next few years changing the previous emphasis that saw the Business Development Section taking this role.

Consequently, it is proposed to disestablish the three posts of Business Development Manager, Housing Benefits Manager and Local Taxation manager and create new posts of Benefits Manager and Revenues Manager. The responsibilities of these new roles will change as the current responsibilities of the Business Development Manager and that section will effectively be split across them with some residual transfer to Customer Services.

In the process of the considerations of this restructure it is proposed that the current Revenues Services Manager is dismissed through early retirement on the grounds of the efficiency of the service. The current service manager will be aged 58 at the time of implementation, has worked for the Council for 27 years and has over 41 years of local government service. Given the extent of the coming changes it is considered it would be in the interest of the service to accept early retirement for this individual.

This has been discussed with the officer and has been accepted by the officer subject to the need for the discretionary elements of payments being authorised by the Appeals and Retirements Committee. The reasons for this decision will be a matter for consideration by that committee.

As all three current managers are to be at potential risk of redundancy, it is proposed that the Service Manager post, if vacated due to retirement, is advertised and ring-fenced to these three post holders as they have the necessary skills and experience to undertake this role. Recruitment from within will avoid a compulsory redundancy situation, enable a smooth transition to the new structure, help maintain performance and deliver the efficiency saving.

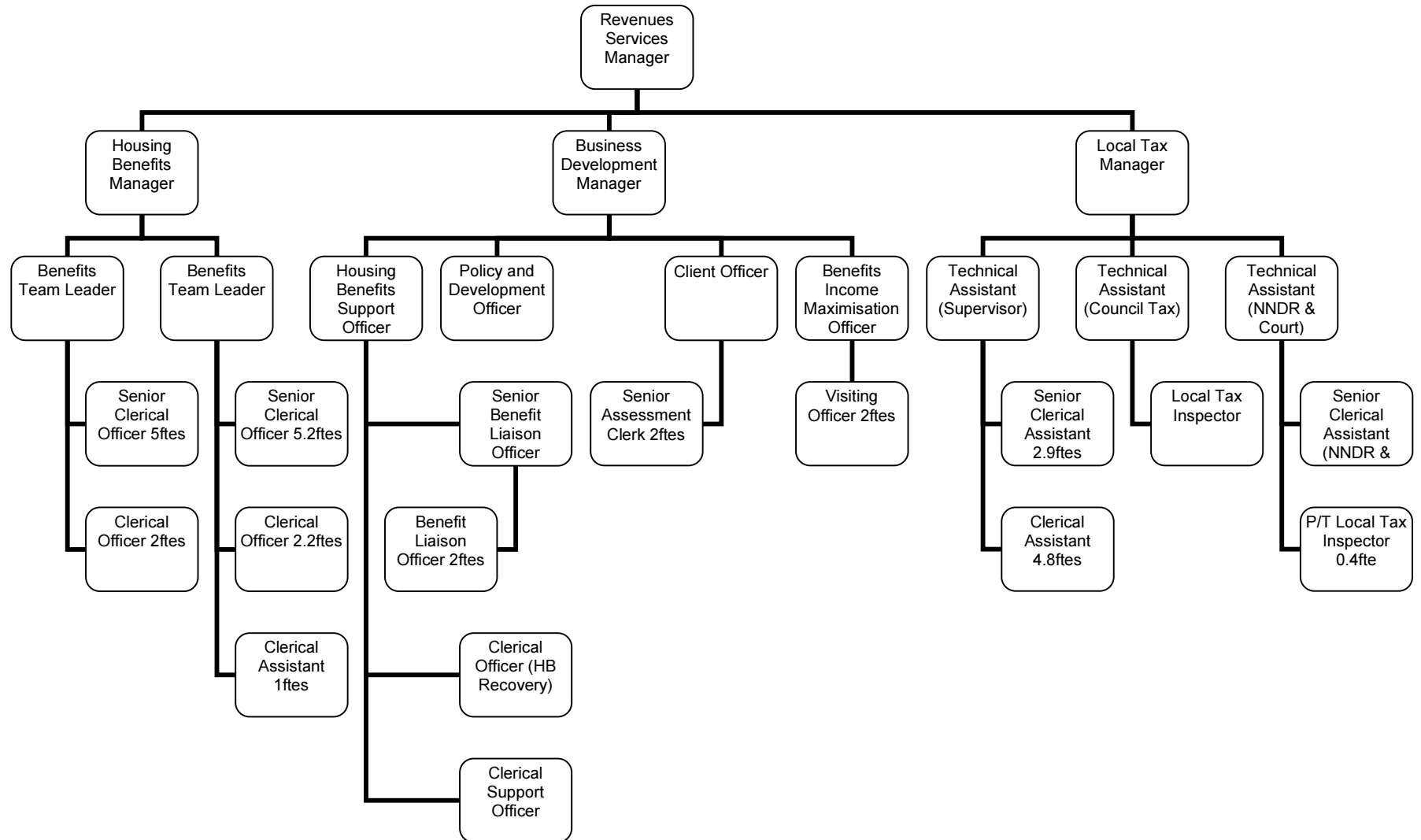
With these general proposals come a number of specific proposals relating to jobs within the service that are likely to be affected. The reasons for these changes are shown in detail at Appendix 1 but essentially relate to the need to respond to legislative change and the need for improved efficiency. A summary of the proposed changes is as below, current and proposed structures can be found at section 5 and a financial analysis of the changes in section 7.

All new post grades have been established through the formal job evaluation process involving both management and union representation.

Posts for Deletion (Occupied)	Ref	Band	Scp Tog	Salary	NI	Pension	Total
Business Development Manager	FRV02	11	40	33661	2657	6126	42444
Housing Benefits Manager	FHB01	10	37	30851	2365	5615	38831
Local Taxation Manager	FRC01	10	37	30851	2365	5615	38831
HB Support Officer	FBS01	9	34	28637	2134	5212	35983
BIMO	FRV03	6	25	21519	1394	3916	26829
V.O. (14.5 hours)		5 X 0.3919	21	7496	0	1364	8860
CT Team Leader	FRC26	7	28	23708	1622	4315	29645
CT Team Leader	FRC35	6	25	21519	1394	3916	26829
CT Team Leader	FC30	6	25	21519	1394	3916	26829
TOTAL				219761	15325	39995	275081
Current Vacancies to be deleted							
CT SCA (part-time)	FRC25B	4 X 0.0676	17	1138	0	207	1345
CT SCA (part-time)	FRI25B	4 X 0.3919	17	6596	0	1200	7796
CT CA (part-time)	FRC20C	3 X 0.3514	13	5427	0	988	6415
TOTAL				13160	0	2395	15555
					GROSS TOTAL		290636
New Posts and changes							
Benefits Manager		11	40	33661	2657	6126	42444
Revenues Manager		11	40	33661	2657	6126	42444
CT Senior Technical Assistant		8	31	26276	1889	4782	32947
CT Technical assistant		7	28	23708	1622	4315	29645
HB Senior Benefit Liaison Officer (Appeals)		7 x 0.5	28	11854	389	2157	14400
TOTAL				129160	9214	23506	161880
				TOTAL NET SAVINGS			128756
Transfers OUT							
V.O. to OSS		5	21	19126	1145	3481	23752
V.O. to OSS		5 x 0.6081	21	11631	366	3117	15114
				30757	1511	6598	38866

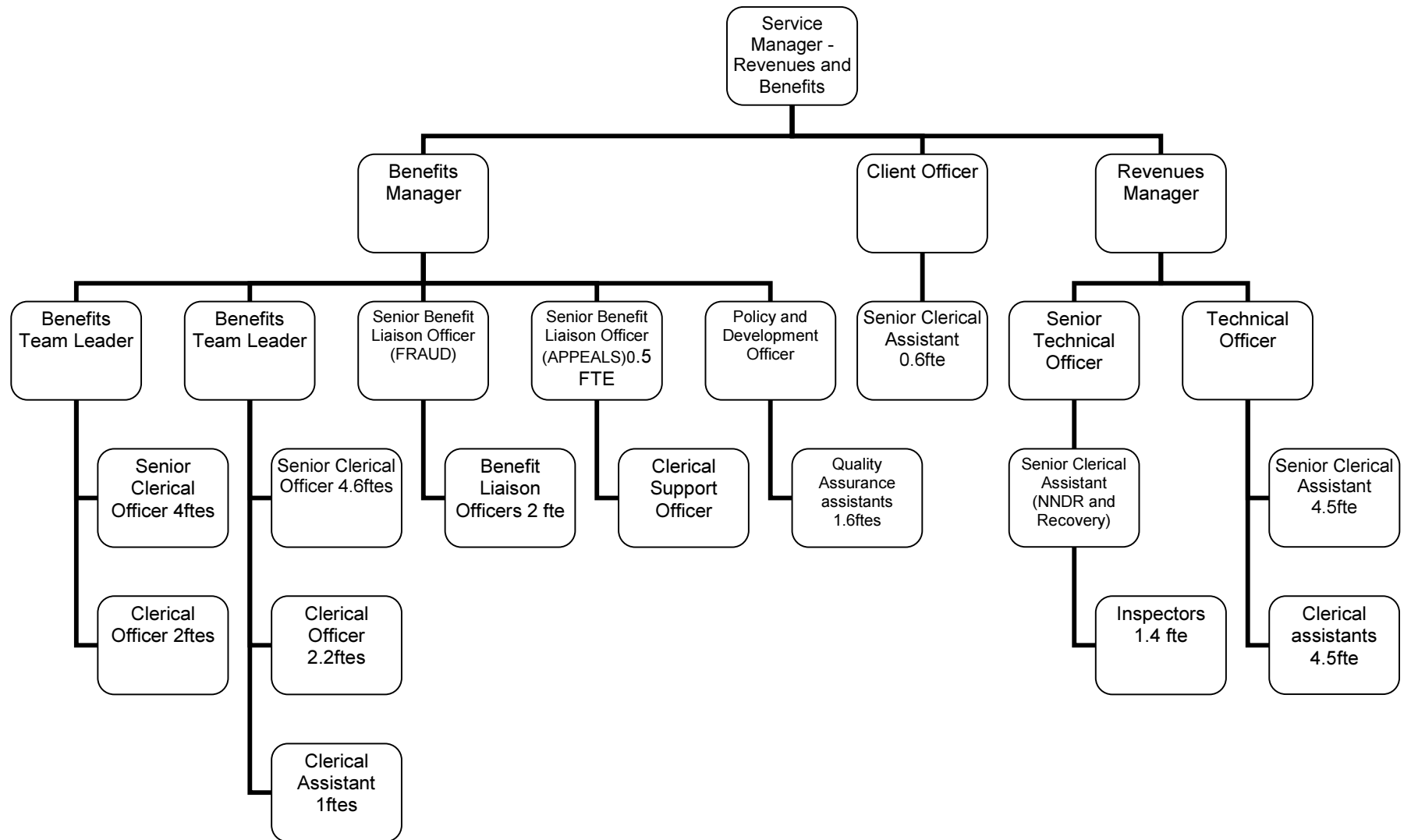
5. STAFFING STRUCTURE

This report recommends a new staffing structure for Revenues Services and the transfer of some staff to Customer Services. **Current Revenues Services Structure:**



Total number of full-time-equivalent (fte) posts = 47.5

Proposed Revenues Services Structure:-



Total number of fte's = 40.9 plus transfer of 1.6 to Customer Services = 42.5 a reduction of 5 fte's.

6. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

Potentially there are a number of post holders that will be affected by these proposals, should they be supported following consultation. Posts proposed for deletion that are currently occupied are:

Business Development Manager
Housing Benefits Manager
Local Taxation Manager
Council Tax team leaders (2)
Benefits Income Maximisation Officer
Visiting Officer part-time

The Council has in place protocols that are accepted to help ensure that, where possible, current employees are not displaced. These will be observed and, in particular, new posts created in the proposals will be ring-fenced for competition from potentially displaced employees in the first instance. Should there be potentially displaced employees remaining following such an exercise to try to redeploy, any remaining vacancies will then be advertised on an internal-only basis in order to try to create other suitable vacancies that might be suitable for redeployment. Throughout these processes, however, there is no guarantee of appointment as applicants will need to demonstrate the necessary skills and competency through the application and selection process.

It is specifically proposed that the current postholders of the Business Development Manager, Local Taxation Manager and Housing Benefits Manager, which are potentially at risk from these proposals, will be ring-fenced for application for the Service Manager post, should it become available following early retirement.

All other postholders potentially displaced would be ring-fenced to apply for all other new and vacant posts existing in the Council at the time of implementation.

Any post remaining unfilled following the ring fenced recruitment process for the “at risk employees” will be advertised internally within the Council and open to application from all permanent staff. Should there be no other internal applicants at this stage other than the at risk candidates, then these employees would not be re-interviewed at this stage without competition and such vacancies would be put out for external advertisement. Internal candidates, including those potentially at risk would then again be eligible to apply for these vacancies.

If there are any unsuccessful at risk staff from the restructure following this process, then those individuals would remain at risk of redundancy and, if possible, alternative suitable employment will be sought from within the Council. Should this not be possible, the issue of redundancy notices may be necessary.

7. Financial analysis

Summary:

Changes in the budgets, based on top of the grade for all posts for 2012/2013 are detailed below:-

Reduction in Core Revenues Services	(128,756)
Visiting Officers transfer out to Customer Services	(38,866)
Management Resource transfer out to Customer Services	(20,000)
Total reduction in Revenues budget	(187,622)

Visiting Officers transfer in to Customer Services	38,866
Management Resource transfer in to Customer Services	20,000
Total increase in Customer Services Budget	58,866

NET CASHABLE SAVINGS	(128,756)
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Estimated Implementation Costs

Redundancy (Potential costs if no redeployment)	24,000
Discretionary compensatory payment under local scheme for retirement of Revenues Services Manager on grounds of efficiency of service	24,860
Pension strain	38,217
Cost of Protection	10,000
Total cost of implementation	97,077

A saving of £31,679 in the first year and £128,756 per annum thereafter.

8. TIMETABLE

The proposals made are relatively complex and involve decisions through a number of routes. In terms of decision to implement, it is proposed that the Chief Executive be identified as having delegated authority. Assuming this officer delegation, the following timetable of implementation is suggested:

		Completed Date
Consideration by Senior Leadership Team	Mid Sept	18/9/12
Meeting to introduce to employees/ union	Start Oct	9/10/12
Meeting of Appeals and Retirement Committee (consider retirement decision/ release of pension in principle)	Late Oct	
(Load JCSC papers)	(11/10/12)	
First meeting of JCSC; start formal 30-day consultation	23/10/12	
30-day consultation ends	23/11/12	
(Load JCSC papers)	(16/11/12)	
Close meeting of JCSC; consider comments/ make recommendation to Appointments and Conditions of Service Committee (ACSC)	28/11/12	
Report budget changes to Cabinet; give authority to commence implementation	10/1/13	
Commence restructuring proposals	10/1/13	
Target date for implementation of new structure	1/4/2013	

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked:

1. to note the detailed report
2. to receive initial comments from employees and union representatives,
3. and to invite employees affected by the proposal, and trade union representatives, to consider the proposal and to forward comment or suggestion to the Corporate Director that will be reported back to, and considered by this JCSC towards the end of the formal consultation period.

BACKGROUND PAPER:

Below are detailed descriptions of the rationale behind changes proposed.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

It is intended to remove the entire Business Development Section from the current establishment structure. This section was previously created in order to develop capacity to move the overall service forward in line with the Council's vision at the time and to maximise the benefits of significant I.T. investment.

This was originally intended to be a 3 to 5 year plan with the Business Development Section moving the service forward with new technologies allowing more automated work practices; to become properly engaged with moving customer access channels to more electronic means; to ensure Benefits take-up is maximised throughout our customer base; to centralise training, performance monitoring and client side functions.

It is felt that the section has been extremely successful in achieving these aims and has implemented, amongst other things:

- A new Workflow and Document Management System (DMS) integrated within the Civica Housing and Council Tax Benefit, NNDR and Council Tax system.
- A full Sundry Debtors system incorporating all of the Council's Debtor functions including those transferred back in from Rushcliffe Council and also integrated within the Civica Workflow and DMS.
- An online Benefits claim form, again, fully integrated.
- The automation of DWP benefit notifications
- An "over the counter" fast track Benefits application service.
- Automated BACS benefit payments
- Substantially enhanced performance monitoring systems
- A Benefits Visiting Officer Service maximising customer take-up
- The formal qualification of a training officer.
- The TELL US ONCE Service
- The Employee Authentication Service for DWP/CIS Benefits
- Policies, procedures and training notes for all functions
- Greatly improved accuracy on subsidy returns
- A one year secondment to the DWP SFIS

However, as stated previously, the Revenues Services sections priorities have changed in that we are now entering a period where statutory legislation is substantially changing and the requirement will be more to successfully manage that transition. Gedling's revenues services are currently in a very good state due to the activities of previous years and by maximising the use of available technology has a strong performance culture and the ability to adapt to change. Such changes are now considered to be fully embedded.

Housing Benefits Support Officer

One of this officer's principal roles was to support the Business Development Manager in the completion of the Benefits subsidy returns. It is felt that this responsibility now be transferred to the new role of Benefits Manager. Similarly, any system and service development in respect of the Benefits function should also transfer to the Benefits Manager.

With these transfers of responsibility it is therefore proposed to disestablish the currently vacant position of Housing Benefits Support Officer.

Policy and Development Officer

The Policy and Development Officer supported the many efficiency and technology changes considered necessary to drive forward system development. However, as stated previously, future challenges are government and statutorily led and mainly concentrated in the benefits area and it is therefore felt that this post would be better placed reporting directly to the new Benefits Manager post.

During 2011 the benefits section implemented a Quality Assurance (QA) tool, integrated within the OPENRevenues system, with the work being undertaken by existing Benefits Assessors. These staff undertake a sampling of claims assessed and determine accuracy and compliance with our processes. In an activity such as Housing Benefits, which has many complicated procedures and results in direct payments to claimants, QA is an increasingly important management tool in order to maintain performance. Having trialled this approach since 2011 it now forms part of our recommended structure.

The outcomes of any QA work have a very close relationship to training requirements and it is therefore felt that the QA team should report to the Policy and Development Officer and also be relocated under Benefits. In order to maximise the flexibility of the resources available within the Benefits section the job description for all Band 5 Benefits staff, including those in the QA team, is amended to take into account this type of work.

Housing Benefits Liaison (Fraud)

In February 2012 the DWP published a national strategy "Tackling fraud and error in Government" creating the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) to investigate all benefit and tax credit offences. The DWP have decided that from April 2013 our Housing Benefits Liaison (Fraud) Section staff will remain with us but will operate under SFIS powers, policies and priorities. This is a short term solution for only a year but the intention is that the entire fraud section will eventually transfer over to the DWP.

In anticipation of the above one member of the GBC fraud team was seconded to the SFIS project for 3 days per week from August 2011 for a year. This was designed in to give the team and the section a greater insight into the future potential ways of working and, indeed, has been of great benefit.

The decision to transfer is likely to be driven by the DWP with regard to subsidy arrangements i.e. if the Council has this portion of funding cut this is likely to force a transfer or redeployment.

It is therefore proposed that the Council's Housing Benefits Liaison (Fraud) Section transfer wholly to the Benefits section with its senior officer reporting directly to the new post of Benefits Manager.

This will allow for an easier transition at a later date as well as allowing the Benefits manager more flexibility in utilising resources over what is expected to be a time of great change.

Benefits Take-up team

Councils have a statutory obligation to ensure that people who may be entitled to Housing and Council Tax Benefit are made aware of that entitlement. The Benefits Income Maximisation Officer (BIMO) position was created in 2008 in order to help achieve this in recognition of the fact that the Council had employed little resources previously in this area. On the whole this has been successful although it has been difficult to identify whether the caseload volume increases have been due to these activities or whether more people are simply in need of financial help due to the economic recession.

Gedling's Benefits caseload has increased slightly more than that of our Nottinghamshire neighbours and is expected to increase further over the next year. It is understood that this is mainly because of the relatively high numbers of Gedling's residents being employed by the Public Sector, where it is expected that further downsizing will occur, and being employed within the construction industry, which has been reported to have been relatively stagnant recently.

The Business Development Section took part in the Notts-wide Mosaic project in November 2010. This project, with the help of Experian records, sought to identify addresses that were thought likely to need help through the Benefits system. However, very few new Benefit claims were generated as a result of the project. The results of the project were reported to SMT in June 2011 and the general conclusion was that our promotional take-up activities and advertising of the benefits scheme over the previous two years had actually been very successful with the result that we may well have achieved as much as was possible. It is recognised nationally that 100% benefits take-up of persons who may be entitled to benefits is an impossible target to achieve.

With this in mind our priorities have changed and we are aiming to increase the accessibility for customers to make a claim. Consequently, we have implemented a top industry-standard electronic online Benefits claim form integrated within the assessment system, an over the counter fast-track service at the Gedling One stop desks and active resource management to increase customer awareness of these facilities at all points of customer access.

Further, we have recently introduced a Risk-Based Verification (RBV) procedure for all new Housing and Council Tax Benefit claims with the aim of effectively reducing the amount of time required to administer and process claims. The associated RBV policy and procedure requires a residency visit only for high risk cases - approximately 25% of the current new claim caseload - low and medium risk claims do not require a visit thereby reducing the requirement for visits generally.

From October 2013 new claims for Housing Benefits for Working Age people will be made under the new Universal Credit (UC) regulations administered by the DWP and the need for

visiting officers to verify such claims will therefore be removed. It is currently expected that by 2017 all new claims for Housing Benefits will have transferred over to the UC system.

In conclusion, the requirements for the BIMO and the Visiting Officers have reduced and it is expected that this will reduce further over the next few years. The Council has set in place sufficient access channels for Gedling's residents to take a greater part in self-service in respect of claiming Benefits but, in any case, the number of new claims that will be made to the Council is set to reduce steadily until Universal Credit is fully implemented.

Further, it is intended that the future primary role of the visiting officers will be to fulfil the Council's own procedural obligations under its RBV policy i.e. to confirm residency for high risk cases, with any spare capacity being utilised for those potential claimants where the access channels prove to be problematic. It is considered that the current VO resource is greater than is needed to fulfil these roles and it is therefore proposed to reduce the Visiting Officer resource from 2 fte's to 1.6 and to transfer this resource to the Customer Services section.

The only access Customer Services currently have for face-to-face and personalised home visits for the entire revenues service is actually through the Visiting Officers and it therefore makes sense that this would be a better utilised resource under this section.

There still remains a need to bring together various aspects of the customer experience in order to gain more knowledge as to how we can facilitate the enhanced use of all customer access channels. It is anticipated that such a role would involve some front / back office liaison, perhaps involving an expanded use of the Visiting Officers to further enable the user aspect of channel access e.g. through the greater use of online claim forms particularly when paper forms become only a contingency rather than the default for customer claims. The customer experience could also be explored and enhanced through the deployment of a "mystery shopper" with its knock-on effects for service performance and delivery. In order to facilitate this it is proposed to transfer resource of £20,000 from Revenues Services to Customer Services.

Client Services

Over the past few years, the role of the Client Officer has become increasingly dominated by FOI requests, Complaints and Data Subject Access requests. As these are commonly across all revenues service areas it is proposed that this position becomes directly accountable to the Revenues Services Manager in order to ensure consistency of response and implementation of any procedural change requirements.

Some clerical support is needed and it is proposed that a part-time Senior Assessment Clerk at Band 4 be transferred from the current Business Development section.

It is also proposed to transfer the Senior Assessment Clerk and the Clerical Officer (HB), both at Band 4, from Business Development to the new Revenues Manager. Their responsibilities regarding refunds, band changes and benefits overpayment recovery are strongly related to the revenues functions and so will simply transfer over.

LOCAL TAXATION

Over the last few years the Local Taxation Section has taken on the Council's Corporate Debtors function within the OPENRevenues integrated computer system. It is therefore felt that, with this in mind, and in order to reflect both the changes to the management structure outlined above and the concentration on more technical and statutory matters this section should now be renamed the Revenues section.

It is proposed that the current position of Local Taxation Manager is disestablished and a new post of Revenues Manager be established and this should now take on board the following aspects of the current Business Development Manager's role:

- The completion of Government Returns in respect of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates.
- Undertaking the calculation and appropriate report for the Council to be able to calculate and set its Council Tax Base.

These are not the only new responsibilities but they are the most significant technical functions for the role and for the Council as a whole.

To reflect the changes to the Revenues Services Manager person specification throughout Revenues the person specification for the new Revenues Manager post has been amended to require that the post-holder now be a full corporate member of the IRRV, the Revenues Service professional body. The new role and qualification has been reflected in the job description and person specification. In order to ensure that there is sufficient contingency within the section it is also proposed that the three team leader posts be disestablished and two new posts created of Senior Technical Assistant, with additional responsibility to assist the Revenues Manager with the completion of Government returns and the closure of accounts and a technical assistant to manage the remainder of the revenues section functions.

HOUSING BENEFITS

During the last twelve months this section has experienced a significant rise in case load and now deals with nearly 10,000 cases per annum. However, it is pleasing to note that significant changes have taken place and performance indicators show a marked improvement in service standards. This section is the most likely to feel the budgetary and resource pressures of the statutory reforms over the next 18 months but also extending to 2017.

From April 2013 the section will be running the current Benefits system along with the new local Council Tax reduction scheme and with Universal Credit due to commence in October 2013, these changes are likely to cause the further reduction in staffing when administration subsidy grant arrangements come into place, with reductions reflecting the transfer of some of the service to the DWP.

These are further reasons for concentrating all benefits related resources into one area allowing the manager in charge to better direct resources where they are needed as new

reforms are implemented. It is felt that, as stated previously, in order to reflect both the changes to the management structure outlined above and the concentration on more technical and statutory matters this section should now be named simply the Benefits section.

It is therefore proposed that the current position of Housing Benefits Manager be disestablished and a new post of Benefits Manager be established and this should now take on board part of the current Business Development Manager's role i.e. the completion of Government Returns in respect of Benefits. The new person specification has been amended to require that the post-holder be a full corporate member of the IRRV, the Revenues Service professional body.

The Benefits Section has also seen an increase in the number of appeals as well as new responsibilities for local discretions in some complex technical areas. There is currently a secondment in place which, in a relatively short length of time, has proved to be very beneficial and it is proposed to make this a permanent arrangement in the new structure.

A new part-time post is therefore created of Housing Benefit Senior Liaison Officer (Appeals). It is anticipated that this new post will have responsibility for Benefits appeals and for any similar matters relating to the new Council Tax reduction scheme and the new Local Welfare Assistance.

This role will also be the first point of call for all matters relating to Discretionary Housing Payments and this will help to resolve the problem of conflict of Interest between assessor and decision maker. This post has been job evaluated and has been graded at Band 7.

Some clerical support is needed here and this will be provided by the transfer of the current clerical officer support currently in the Fraud and Visiting Officers section.