

Housing and Council Tax Benefit – Service Improvement

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Housing and Council Tax Benefit – Service Improvement

1.1 Introduction

As part of this Council's commitment to achieving service efficiency and best value, the Housing and Council Tax Benefit service, referred to in this report as Benefits, was identified as a key area for improvement.

Between April and July 2004 a team comprising of Swale Borough Council, SBC, staff, with support and facilitation provided by Vanguard Consulting, undertook a review of Benefit processes using the Vanguard lean system methodology. The review process focused on what was required to satisfy customer needs and included, looking not only at the Benefit Section itself, but also at interlinked services with their outside partners such as Swale Housing Association, Department of Works and Pensions, DWP, the Benefits Agency and voluntary groups.

The recommended changes to working practises and processes have now been in effect since July 2004 and this report provides a detailed account of the lean system approach applied to Benefits and the effectiveness of this approach. 18 months later, this Council has been transformed from one of the worst performing authorities in 2003/04 to one performing within the standards required by DWP. A significant improvement has been made in staff morale that was at an all time low and, most importantly, this Council now provides a much improved customer focused service.

1.2 Background

Prior to this review the Benefit service in Swale had historically experienced severe problems in managing backlogs of work. Backlog had become "a way of life". Swale Borough Council had the dubious privilege of being only the second authority in the country to be inspected by the BFI three times whose reports cited such poor performance that there was a likelihood of direct action by the Secretary of State. An appraisal by the DWP Help Team brought in during 2003/04 when the Benefit situation had reached critical point, cited such issues as poor communication, a lack of performance measures and poor speed of processing.

The situation had been exacerbated following problems experienced during and after the implementation of an integrated Benefit and Council Tax system in March 2003. This had been a traumatic experience with massive conversion difficulties. For a year there had been the need for manual checking and correcting. Significant down time occurred with the system failing which left staff with a lack of confidence in using the system, further slowing progress and understanding.

In the past the Council had put more and more resources into clearing backlogs of work instead of looking at the way work was actually handled. In fact, technology had been allowed to dictate the way the service was performed. Use of an electronic document management system had brought many advantages and positive benefits but subsequently ended up with too many document types, too many electronic work trays, a rigidity in the process, too much use of forwarding and pending documents and a lack of useful performance measuring.

With the introduction of a systems approach, redesigning work looked at what the customer needed and made sure that every task undertaken met that need. Redesign involved those people who knew best, who talked to the customers and actually did the work and also had the support of the Director of Corporate Services, Governance and Scrutiny

1.3 Report Summary

- In total 25 processes that support the Benefit practice were flow charted/ mapped. 14 processes with varying levels of complexity were identified as areas needing some change to the process and/or work flow to provide improved customer service

- It was identified that re-design of work processes, de-fragmentation of processes between services units and knowledge transfer supported by training and IT technology would use existing resources more efficiently and enable staff within Benefits to concentrate on what matters to their customers – the calculation and assessment of entitlement.
- 36 action points were required to facilitate the implementation of recommended changes to introduce a clean work flow
- A financial saving has been estimated of £442,572 following implementation of the process changes. This total includes the significant reduction in the loss of subsidy in Rent Allowance, Non Housing Revenue Account, Non HRA, Homeless Families Rebates and Council Tax benefit, reduction in staffing costs and operational expenses e.g. printing and stationery
- Efficiency savings in the terms of re-directed manpower have been estimated at 83 hours, equivalent to 2.25 full time posts. Although these savings have been identified they have/or will enable staff within the Benefits service to concentrate on work practises that had been given lower priority, if they were done at all. These additional work practises will contribute to Swale Borough Council providing an improved and quality service
- The impact of the changes on the service provided to claimants during 2004/05 was the reduction of days taken to process a claim from 180 days to 35 days and the processing of changes of circumstances from over 100 days to just 20 days. The new way of working maintained the improved performance during 2005/06. No backlog of work exists
- As a result of the new way of working, the average overpayment recovery rate has increased from 54% in 2004/05 to 75% in 2005/06 putting Swale in the top quartile of all Authorities.
- There has been a increase in value demand thereby supporting the system approach in providing a service with the customers needs in mind
- The structure of the Benefits section was revised to take into account new roles and responsibilities. Generic employee posts within the Benefit service have been established with 26% of staff cross trained on all aspects of claimant interviewing, phones and internet services, calculation and assessment of entitlement
- The conversion problems in 2003/04 experienced during system implementation have been addressed. With the introduction of the new clean stream processing of Benefits our relationship with Registered Social Landlords, RSL, particularly Swale Housing Association, SHA, have improved dramatically. The granting of interest free loans to RSL's in respect of housing benefit late payments is not anticipated to be a future cost liability.
- The relationship with the Benefit Agency/Job Seeker Plus has greatly improved with regular interaction of staff and the ability to address issues as they arise. The initial process changes during the review using clean stream worked extremely well. Following the BA's introduction of a Customer Management System, CMS, however, the problems currently being experienced within the Benefit Agency/Job Seeker Office are impacting on Swale's performance regarding the days taken to process a claim
- Following the application of clean work flow principals within the Council Tax section it was identified that further improvements could be made that benefited both Council Tax and the Benefits section. These have since been put into place and are working effectively

1.4 Sustainability, improved performance and continuous development

- The organisation has invested in a Service Improvement Officer, SIO, within Benefits to regularly monitor and review the process to ensure it does not slide back into a customer service with a

high failure demand. Any revisions to the processes are considered by the SIO with customer focus in mind

- 24 fully trained staff currently supports eight trainee staff members. The responsibility of mentoring and training these trainees lies with the experienced staff. Once these officers are fully trained performance is predicted to increase and the likelihood of needing agency staff for peaks in the work demand will be minimal, if required at all.
- Improvements are planned during 2006 to the standard letters currently sent to claimants to address the occurrences of failure demand. This will include using the combined Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit notification letters
- During 2006 a trial will be held with electronic claim forms, which will primarily be used by staff on the telephone. Discussions are ongoing with regards to Internet usage
- The Appeals and Liaison team will now be able to reinstate holding regular 'take up days' to encourage the take up of all benefits. Additionally regular landlord forums can now be held/attended together with an increase in the attendance of officers to defend submissions at court. They will also seek to spend time on ensuring publicity material is up to date and in plain English, working in partnership with other Kent Authorities where efficiencies and shared workload can be used.
- A result of the clean flow process keeping work up to date, is the prevention of an overpayment occurring. Now, by being able to act quickly, the overpayment created is likely to be minimal resulting in less loss of subsidy and easier recovery action. By reinstating work processes that had lapsed i.e. review of system-generated reports and the identification of discrepancies, there has been, and should continue to be, a substantial reduction in the number and value of overpayments.
- The Fraud Investigation and Debt Management teams are scheduled for review by the Service Improvement Officer during 2006 to bring them in line with the concept of clean flow working and integration with the way the Benefits Section are now effectively working
- System generated reports will be kept up to date. These report on any discrepancies and allow proactive action to be taken for example on "diary dates", "changes in significant birthdays", "CTAX generated changes", "payments on high rents" and "re-referrals to the Rent Service"
- During March 2006 the Service Improvement Officer will review the current Benefit staffing structure, looking at roles and responsibilities within the team. At the same time a demand analysis will be completed to ensure the principles and clean flow of work remains unchanged
- During 2006 a questionnaire will be sent to staff asking them to comment on what, in their view, is working and where further improvements can be made. The will continue the development of staff involvement and improve communications within the Benefit section.

2. Lean System Process

The Vanguard methodology is used to transform a service by first understanding the work as a system and then identifying opportunities for improvement. Understanding workflow is an essential first step in making change.

To undertake this review a project team consisted of the following members: -

Caron McCarthy	Document Controller
Andrea French	Assessment Officer
Zoe Kent	Enquiry Team – front line
Ginny Wilkinson	Enquiry Team – front line
Sarah Beeching	Internal Audit
Bridget Kelly:	Vanguard Consultant

Vicky Harsden	Vanguard Consultant
Sarah Benjamin	Vanguard Consultant
Mark Radford:	Director of Corporate Services, Governance and Scrutiny
Mark Radford	Project Sponsor

Pilot

Valerie West	Assessment Officer – Sittingbourne District Office
Andrea French	Assessment Officer - Sittingbourne District Office
Zoe Kent	Enquiry Team – front line - Sittingbourne District Office
Ginny Wilkinson	Enquiry Team – front line - Sittingbourne District Office

Implementation Team:

Claire Cooper	Assessment Officer - Sheerness District Office
Sandra Goddard	Assessment Officer - Sheerness District Office
Rod Kennett	Assessment Officer - Faversham District Office
Jo Sait	Assessment Officer - Faversham District Office
Zoe Kent	Enquiry Team – front line - Sittingbourne District Office
Ginny Wilkinson	Enquiry Team – front line - Sittingbourne District Office
Lisa Gibbs	Enquiry Team – front line - Sheerness District Office
Anne Prosser	Enquiry Team – front line - Sheerness District Office
Pauline Young	Enquiry Team – front line - Faversham District Office
Sonya Field	Enquiry Team – front line - Faversham District Office

Between April and July 2004 members of the team carried out either or both the ‘check’ and ‘Re-Design’ stages of the Vanguard methodology as detailed within the following sections

2.1 Vanguard Methodology - ‘Check’

‘Check’ establishes the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of current performance and also signposts where efficiencies can be made in the best possible places. Change should be based on knowledge and the team therefore needed to understand how the “work works”. It was agreed that the purpose of the section was ‘to assess and pay benefit in an accurate and timely manner. Refer to Appendix A for Model of ‘Check’

Throughout ‘check’ it is important to understand the nature of demand –

- Where do our customers place demand on our system?
- What do we know about type and frequency of demand?
- The two major types of demand – **Value demand**, what we are here for and what we want. **Failure Demand**, a failure to do something or do something right for our customer.

Results of demand were compiled over a four week period and have been summarised as follows:-

Value Demand calculated at 34% received at the Counters

- Customers wishing to claim
- Claim forms complete
- Claim forms not complete
- Can I have a form
- Council Tax help
- Change in circumstances

Failure demand calculated at 66% received at the Counters

- Evidence on its own
- Progress chasing
- I don’t understand
- I don’t agree
- Payments are incorrect
- Others

Value Demand calculated at 44% received in the Post

- Application – all evidence
- New Claim – not completed
- Cancel claim
- C/Circs letter + some evidence
- Rent officers decision
- Fraud

Failure Demand calculated at 56% received in the Post

- Evidence on its own
- C/Circs – evidence/letter not complete
- Returned Post
- Appeals/Backdating
- Progress Chasing
- Other

Value Demand calculated at 22% received on the Telephones.

- I want to make a claim / appointment / form
- Change in circumstances
- Council Tax

Failure Demand calculated at 78% received on the Telephones.

- Progress chasing
- I do not agree...
- Payment queries
- I do not understand...
- I've sent this evidence
- Council Tax
- Notice Seeking Possession / evictions

On understanding the work as a system and how the work flowed through that system, the team identified 'waste' in the flow, which caused re-work, duplication, lost time, checking and other activities that added no value to the customer.

The following information in Table A details the 'waste' found in 'check'

Table A

Waste Found in 'Check' - re-work, duplication, lost time, checking and other activities that added no value to the customer	
WASTE	IMPACT
<p>COUNTERS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Claim forms are accepted from the customer at the Reception area. No advice is given at this stage. ➤ Customer queue to have their documents scanned. ➤ Claim forms are taken from customer but customers are not given any time span of when their claim will be dealt with. ➤ 25% duplicate claim forms, us & 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 99% of our claim forms are returned unfit for purpose. Customers have not been given any direction on what happens next. ➤ This is work to keep the queue down & achieve measures. Not always time to spend with the customers in the right place. ➤ Repeated visits to the office by customers chasing progress of their claim. Due to delay in processing often customers are asked for more up to date evidence. ➤ Duplication of time spent on checking, scanning,

<p>Benefit Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Temporary numbers set-up for new accounts ➤ Checklists completed. ➤ Backdating requests are often incomplete. Customers not given enough advice and support. ➤ Evidence is received prior to claim forms being scanned onto the system. ➤ Customer unable to understand our letters. ➤ Customers visit to progress chase their claim only to be told that we are unable to give any time scale as to when the claim will be assessed. Frontline staff rings through to request priority in certain cases only to be told the work will be dealt with in date order. ➤ Customers often become distraught in interviews yet frontline staff do not have the power to ask for immediate assessment. 	<p>batching, indexing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Causes re-work as new reference number set up when assessed. This could be done at first point of contact. ➤ Customers should have clear advice and written confirmation of what they need to provide. ➤ Backdating requests are turned down. Customers then appeal which has a knock on to the ALO team. ➤ Frontline staff spends time when interviewing on checking & searching for links – longer waiting times for interviews. ➤ Frontline staff spends time explaining letters and often contact assessor if notepads are not clear. - Longer waiting times for interviews. ➤ Creates failure demand. Customers in desperate situations will continue to progress chase on a regular basis. No customer contact has caused back office staff to lose sight of our purpose ➤ Unsatisfied customers create failure demand on the counter and phones, also impacts on ALO team and Managers who have to deal with complaint letters.
<p>CALL CENTRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Claim forms are sent out without any supporting information ➤ Customers ring to progress chase their claim only to be told that we are unable to give any time scale as to when the claim will be assessed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Customers return their claims without any supporting evidence. Delays- as the evidence is requested at a later date. Customers make several visits to their local office to provide information that should have been requested at the first point of contact. ➤ 40% of customers visit twice ➤ 17% - 3 times ➤ 5% - 4 times ➤ 3% - 5 times ➤ 19% - 6 times ➤ 2% - 8 times ➤ 1% - 10 times ➤ Creates failure demand on the phones. Customers in desperate situations will continue to process chase on a regular basis. Front line staff's ability to help limited. Morale of staff at an all time low, increased stress levels, high sickness of staff. Increase volume of complaints received

WASTE	IMPACT
<p>DOCUMENT CONTROL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ New claim that have no reference number or property number are held – memo sent to C/Tax. ➤ Post sorted by type, evidence then put into 38 different pigeonholes ready for scanning. ➤ Indexing – documents indexed to several trays – 174 trays – 109 document types. ➤ 2% of documents are incorrectly indexed. ➤ Claim forms that state “Ready” still go through the sorting, batching, and indexing process. ➤ Temporary numbers set up – approx 302 temp numbers per month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Delays - Customers progress chase No visibility for frontline staff. ➤ Time delay and duplication – makes it harder to learn the job ➤ Time delay – harder to learn the job. ➤ Delays, letters requesting information are going out incorrectly ie asking for evidence we already have. Failure demand on the counters and telephones. Claims are also withdrawn incorrectly. ➤ Time delay – customer progress chase ➤ Duplication created – two temp numbers sometimes issued in error. Evidence can end up indexed to another number – claims are nil qualified – customers given wrong information. Customer progress chasing.
<p>ASSESSMENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Separation of Assessment staff and frontline staff. ➤ Changes of circumstances – 90% do not have enough evidence. ➤ Claims are suspended on receipt of a change. Customers are advised of the suspension but they are not given any explanation of the reasons why. ➤ Assessors check claims and changes, further evidence is requested 90% of the time. On the return of the evidence it is scanned to changes or back to the month it was requested. ➤ Targets interfere with performance – Assessment staff advised by DWP that they should complete X amount of documents per day to clear outstanding work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No direct contact with customers or frontline staff - Assessment staff / Frontline staff are not aware of each other problematic situations – sensitive / questionable cases. ➤ Time delay - Customers have to several visits to offices – longer waiting times. This creates failure demand on the counters and telephones. ➤ Creates failure demand on the phones and counters. ➤ Time delay and double handling. The next Assessor re-checks and asks for further evidence to avoid awkward assessments – work goes round in circles. ➤ Supporting evidence is completed prior to assessment – Targets are reached but the work is not done.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 6% of new claims received fail to qualify, yet the claims still go through the work flow until the customer is notified. ➤ Notepads are not always completed at the time of assessment. ➤ Interim Payments ➤ Rent officer decisions awaiting assessment. At the time of 'check' there were 664 decisions awaiting action going back 17 months. ➤ Assessment officer's work is forced. No access to all trays – assessors have to contact their team leader to enable them to move documents to others tray's. ➤ At time of 'check' changes go back to 2002. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Doing things that add no value to the customer. ➤ Frontline staff rely on notepads in order to answer enquiries. Creates 'waste' when frontline staff have search the system and often manually calculate to enable them to answer the enquiry. ➤ Interim payments cause waste and re-work. This action can also lead to under/overpayments, which causes failure demand on our counters and phones. ➤ Causes re-work - claims are visited twice. Failure demand on the counter and phones as customers become confused when their rent increases/decreases after a long period following their assessment ➤ Re-work and handoffs ➤ Creates failure demand with customers progress chasing. Customers become confused as they may receive an over/underpayment after a long period of time. Impact on ALO and Managers dealing with letters of complaint.
<p>OTHER PARTNERS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 20% of new claims come in via the Benefit Agency. The BA issue a different claim form from ours to claim HB/CTB ➤ 18% of new claims come in via Swale Housing officers. The forms are completed on behalf of their customers but they do not have enough information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Causes failure demand on the counters and telephones. Customers become confused and complete numerous claim forms – 1 in 4 have more than 1 claim form. Duplication in sorting, batching, scanning and indexing. ➤ Creates failure demand on the counters and telephones. Customers become confused as they are contacted again to provide further information.

Sample check:

Understanding workflow is an essential first step in making change. 200 cases waiting for evidence were sampled and examined for the reasons why the evidence was not provided with the claim.

Numbers	Evidence missing	Reasons why evidence not provided.
69	Residence	The supporting information sheet that accompanies our claim form does not mention residence. Staff have a checklist but the list does not mention what is not acceptable.
63	Income Support JSA	Customer is advised not to send in benefit books. Evidence obtained by RAT request
42	Rent	Our claim form states that customer can provide their rent books as proof of rent. However, assessors do not accept these.
61	Capital	Customers are required to provide two monthly statements but this is not stated on our forms. Form design has complicated wording and it is not suitable or customer friendly.
52	Identity	Form design – Customer are advised that we can accept utility bills but assessors do not accept these.
18	NINO	Needed but not requested on our claim form.
26	Child Benefit	Customer's who get paid via their bank account do not have proof of their C/B unless they have kept their original award letter or annual update notification. Customers provide their bank statements as proof but this is not accepted.
17 5 4	State Pensions DLA Attendance Allowance	Customers are advised not to send their order books through the post. On receipt of the claim we write for proof of the customers benefit – RATs could be done to retrieve this information.
22	Earnings	If customers have difficulty in obtaining information from their employer we do not offer any help or assistance.
11	WTC/CTC	Customers provide their benefit payment books. However, we ask for their award letters.
7	Others	
14	Private Pensions	Customers have difficulty in providing proof of their private pensions that are paid directly into their bank account. We do not accept proof of a private pension from the bank statement.

Sample check:

Weekly reports are produced from Academy to identify claims that are due to be made defective, as the information has not been provided after 28 days. 159 cases were sampled from this report to establish if there were any other reasons why the information was not received

28 Day Report

51%	Information not provided
23%	Information provided and went to the correct tray
13%	Provided but NOT returned back to the assessor
5%	We have written out again requesting the information
3%	Contacted us and resulting in their time being extended
2%	Were incorrectly indexed
1%	Overpayment letters
1%	Not required
1%	Provided via Visiting Officer

System Conditions

System conditions that were the primary causes of waste or failure demand such as procedures, policy vs. practice, process and workflow design and IT systems were also identified

Authorisation / decision making

- Scan rejects deletions can only be done by certain people
- Several different people check rent referrals prior to being sent.
- Limited RAT users – no frontline staff are authorised.
- No access to other users trays.

Functional

Functional work design creates 'Waste' eg – checking, sorting, batching, queuing, handoffs and duplication. It consumes resources, encourages errors and builds in delays.

- Staff do not see process from end to end
- Work is separated = "Not my job", "We could do more"

Forms and Letter Design

- Form and letter design generates "waste"
- Our form is hard to understand, longwinded and confusing and it does not ask for all the correct supporting evidence.
- Customers acquire our forms from several different sources. However, they do not get assistance in completing the form.
- BA forms are not designed for our purpose. They are harder to complete, have too many areas to sign and the questions we require are not covered on their form. This leads to the customer completing more than one form.

Inspections

- Creates extra steps in the flow and huge amount of checking causing non-value work. i.e. DWP, BFI, VF, Best Value, Audit
- Staff members often mis-interpret VF and there is a distinct lack of clarity of the requirements needed.

Measures

- Manage by numbers – Production based (activity, status of work etc) – useful to control the work but doesn't allow us to improve the work.
- Focus – Achieve the numbers not the purpose
e.g. See customers within 15 minutes at the counter
e.g. Complete 39 documents in a day
- Measures drive work design – Pigeonholes, Indexing etc.

Measures causing managers to tamper / Interfere with flow of work.

- Difficult to get measures that relate to purpose & capability
- Measures are related to people not the work
- Management – manage people and the backlog but not the system (work flow)
- Pay and rewards are related to activity
- Staff Grading – Harder to recruit (pay etc)

Following completion of 'check' a full systems picture was completed. This picture highlighted the complexity of the process, system conditions that influenced processing, value and failure demand and areas where the service failed in its customer service. See Appendix B

2.2 System Re-design

Having completed the 'check' stage the team then focused on the following principles that were to be followed: -

- Design against demand
- Customer sets nominal value – what matters to them.
- Only do value work
- Work must flow 100% clean
- Pull not push
- People take responsibility for their own work.
- Single piece flow
- Expertise at the front line
- Minimise handoffs – build one-stop capability
- Measures must :
 - Relate to purpose
 - Demonstrate capability (performance versus purpose) and variation
 - Be end to end times
 - Be used by people who do the work to control & improve the work
 - Be used by managers to work on the system.

Preparation on how to re-design and/or clean stream the processes within Housing Benefit section included the following:

- Agree purpose of the work flow
- Identify the value work
- Identify what we know/think matters to customers about the value work
- Define clear measures of purpose and set clear goals that set out scope for improvement e.g. Zero failure demand, changes made at point of contact, right first time, 100% clean flow of work.

The plan for re-design was to improve the work through 'clean streaming' and/or 'direct action' by:

- Setting up experiments to learn how to get the work 'clean'
- Working upstream and downstream of the core work- cooperation with others - IT, C/Tax, the Benefit Agency, Rent Officer Service, SHA
- Improving key support processes.

Initial flows to be redesigned included:

- Post
- Counter
- Telephones
- Two way co-operation between C/Tax and Benefits

Clean Flow Process Changes

Table B documents what changes were identified from 'check' for redesign and what action was required to implement that change. The risks / consequences relating to re-design were also considered.

A pilot scheme was run for a period of two weeks prior to full implementation of the clean flow process to ensure any significant problems were identified and addressed

Table B

Proposed Change	Action required to implement change
COUNTERS – FRONT LINE	
➤ We would only take claims that were clean. We return those that are not clean back to the customer and put the onus on the customer to return their form with all of the	➤ We would need to spend time with the customer at the front end of the process to ensure understanding and we would offer support to the customer throughout the process.

<p>supporting evidence to ensure that when the claim is returned it will be 100% clean and workable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No evidence is scanned prior to accepting the claim form. ➤ Customers who fail to qualify should be advised at first point of contact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Evidence is only accepted to support a clean change in circumstances or a clean claim form. This would be explained at the first point of contact. ➤ Staff advised to look at income/capital at earliest opportunity to establish any entitlement.
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There would be confusion over the claim start date if the claim forms were given back ➤ Concerns that customers would not bring in all documentation ➤ Risk of customer losing their claim form. ➤ Risk of customers being given conflicting information from different members of staff. 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In a case where the claim form was handed back to the customer, the customer would be given a request for information – listing all documentation that we would need to support their claim. The request would be signed by the customer confirming the date they made their claim, a copy of the letter would be retained by SBC and a copy issued to the customer with their stamped claim form. On return of the claim form the start date used would be the date of the signed letter and the original claim date stamp. If the claim was never returned the claim could be made defective on the strength of the retained signed request for information. ➤ Customers would be advised at the first point of contact of their responsibility to return their claim form and all documentation. In return we would offer a speedy assessment whilst they waited. ➤ Time would be spent on the counters and telephones to explain to the customer our new way of working. Customers would be advised that the onus would be on them to return everything that was needed to carry out an assessment. However, in a case where a customer loses their original claim we would have proof of the claim on our correspondence frame, as each claim form handed back would have an accompanying request for information. ➤ To ensure uniformity frontline staff to be issued with laminated guidance notes detailing what supporting evidence the customer needed to provide.
<p>TEMPORARY NUMBERS – FRONT LINE</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Temporary numbers will no longer be set up. On receipt of new claims a correspondence claim will be set up on Academy in preparation for the claim. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Staff given clear instruction in the form of guidance notes for all new procedures.
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ None Identified. 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p>

Proposed Change	Action required to implement change
EVIDENCE AND VF COMPLIANCE:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ When accepting documentation to support a claim/change in circumstances we must try to obtain sufficient evidence but also be prepared able to look at the bigger picture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Staff should be advised and given guidance on what is deemed reasonable. ➤ Reliance should not be placed on one form of document; we cannot take an unreasonable stance not to assess entitlement if the claimant is not in the position to provide documentation
Proposed Change	
Action required to implement change	
<i>Risks/consequences of Re-design:</i>	<i>Justification to support Re-design</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Staff concern that we would not be VF compliant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ VF is about being reasonable.
BACKDATING REQUESTS – FRONT LINE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Customers will be assisted and supported in full with their requests for backdating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We will assist our customers in full and help to obtain information to support their request where possible. In cases where the Interviewer is aware that supporting evidence will be needed to assist the backdating the interviewer should make this clear at the earliest opportunity and advise the customer what documentation they will need to provide. ➤ Assessment staff will be on hand at the time of the interview to ask any further questions in support of their decision to award /turndown backdating. ➤ Training Sessions to be held for all frontline staff, supporting training notes to be given to assist with the new working procedures. Project Team support will be available to answer any enquires that may arise from the new working methods.
<i>Risks/consequences of Re-design:</i>	<i>Justification to support Re-design</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Staff could influence the backdating request whereas it is the customer's responsibility to show good cause for backdating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Customers applying for backdating have often been faced with stress related problems e.g. hospitalization, death of a partner etc, and eviction. Therefore they are not always able or in a position to write their backdating request. ➤ Backdating requests in the past have been turned down because of lack of information. These decisions are often overturned when the case goes for reconsideration. This action causes 'waste' in the system. If we offer the correct assistance at the first port of call this will not only give a better service but will also reduce failure demand for the ALO team. ➤ Assessment staff to work in hand with front line staff. Assessment staff should be in touch with the customer's situation, talking through the customer's reasons for backdating often helps with the assessor's decision.

Proposed Change	Action required to implement change
CALL CENTRE (BENEFITS) – FRONT LINE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Claim forms to be completed whilst the customer is on the line. The customer should be given good sound advice and assistance. At the end of the call the customer should be aware of exactly what they need to provide to ensure their claim forms comes in clean and ready for immediate assessment. All customers should be encouraged to visit their local district office. ➤ The customer should be guided and assisted throughout their claim. ➤ Time should be spent with the customer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We would need to spend time with the customer at the front end of the process to ensure understanding. ➤ We would offer support to the customer throughout the process. ➤ Staff manning the telephones will be encouraged to spend time with the customer to ensure full understanding. Staff should not be monitored on the amount of calls they take.
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Customer may face longer waiting times. Complaints will be made via the CSC if customers are held up in a queue. 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Whilst we appreciate customers may have to wait a little longer, time invested at the front end of the process is vital. To overcome longer waiting periods we would need to ensure that we provide a full team to man the telephones throughout the initial pilot. A high percentage of our failure demand is generated through customer progress chasing. Once the backlog is cleared and failure demand is addressed this will free up capacity to enable staff to take longer on their calls.
POST / SCANNING	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Post to be dealt with prior to scanning of documents. <p>Scanning process to be moved to the end of the flow once assessment staff has dealt with it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Post to be opened by assessment staff, distributed and dealt with in paper format. Once dealt with the assessment officer should write on the paper document the nature of the document and where it should be scanned to e.g. complete. ➤ Document control staff to scan documents to the appropriately marked trays. <p>Note: This process created a problem with non-visibility of incoming post when post could not be cleared daily. Revisions were made to the process to scan documents (not claim forms) received by the core team only</p>

Proposed Change	Action required to implement change
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If the system went down or there was a period of staff shortages outstanding work with no visibility would become a problem. 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ For the period of the pilot we will work on the post in paper format, this process will be clearly monitored and the process re-visited if required.
CLAIM ADMINISTRATION – FRONT LINE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Assessment staff should work alongside frontline staff to give an immediate assessment on receipt of a clean claim or a supported change in customer's circumstances. ➤ Assessment staff to explain their decisions and award letters where necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Agreement from staff to work at districts. ➤ Agreement that there is enough office space at the districts to situate assessment staff. ➤ Office equipment such as computer/printers and scanners all to be moved to districts. ➤ Telecommunications to be set up. ➤ Existing office furniture moved to districts. ➤ Agreement from assessment staff to carry out frontline work where previously their role was entirely back office.
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Staff may have concerns with frontline work and customer contact. The argument was that frontline staff were employed as interviewers knowing that their role involves face to face situations. However, back office staff often do not like confrontation and therefore opted for non face to face work. 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The aim in re-design is to be more customer focused. When you are not in touch with the customer it is easy to lose sight of your purpose. In the past we were unable to give customers clear indication when their claims would be dealt with, customers would become argumentative and often aggressive towards staff. However, we now offer a service where the onus is on the customer to provide all necessary documentation to support their claim and on their return we can offer an assessment whilst they wait, customers in general should be less quarrelsome.
CLAIM ADMINISTRATION – FRONT / BACK OFFICE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ All staff should take ownership of their work. ➤ New claims - Rent Officer referrals should be sent on sight of claim form. ➤ No interim payments to be made to claimants. All assessments to be made following rent officer decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Electronic Transfers - Electronic mail often requires further evidence to support a claim / change the request for information should be pended and the customer encouraged to bring documentation back to their local office. However, if the information is requested via the post, on receipt of the returned information, the documents should be passed to the requesting officer for assessment. ➤ Staff advised that checking of rent referrals prior to forwarding to the Rent Office Service is no longer necessary. ➤ Rent Officer agreement received to give those cases highlighted as Vanguard project priority for a decision

Proposed Change	Action required to implement change
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Periods of sickness and holiday's documents could be left in assessment officer's trays. 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Team Leaders to monitor trays throughout staff absence.
RAT USERS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Frontline, Document Control and Assessment staff to become RAT users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ PID's to be issued to all users and training to be given
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increased access to secure system ➤ Inexperienced staff 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Training to be provided as required
AWARD LETTERS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Following assessment customers will be advised to collect their documents from their local district office and their award letter. Failing this assessment officer should ring the customer to explain the assessment to ensure the customer has full understanding. ➤ All templates for letters to be looked at in the view of redesigning them and making the letters more customer friendly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Frontline staff and assessment staff should assist customers with explanations of their assessments and explain their letters in full. ➤ System Administrator advised that we are experiencing a high % of failure demand from our customers because they do not understand our letters. The System Administrator has agreed that this will be a project for her assistant now in post.
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Longer waiting times for customers. 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Customers who are returning to collect their documents and award letters are advised to report to the reception area. The reception staff notifies benefits that the customer is waiting and a member from the team either call the customer next or the assessment officer will go out to the customer and give them their documentation and explain their award.
RENT OFFICER SERVICE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Rent officer decisions to be given priority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Agreement with the rent officer to deal with our referrals (marked Vanguard pilot) promptly.
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design:</i></p> <p>None identified.</p>	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Opportunity to improve service and to give a quicker turn around of claims

Proposed Change	Action required to implement change
TWO WAY COOPERATION BETWEEN C/TAX AND HOUSING BENEFITS:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 'Check' identified an apparent breakdown between the two sections. The benefit sections were often beholden to the C/Tax to apply exemptions/ discounts before we could continue with the work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Agreement with C/Tax manager for benefit staff to make direct contact with C/Tax staff to apply exemptions / discounts on request.
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design:</i></p> <p>None identified</p>	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Opportunity to improve customer service and reduce handoffs
CLAIM FORMS:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Claim forms to be redesigned. Currently they are hard to understand and often confusing. They do not give correct information on the advice notes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Claim forms to be re-designed, supporting information giving the customer clear information in a way that ensures understanding
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ None identified 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Opportunity to improve claim design and provide additional information
OUTSIDE PARTNERS:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Benefits Agency and Jobseekers Plus. Arrange for BA to use Swale's Housing Benefit Claim forms instead of their own which was causing the customer confusion ➤ To accompany the claim form the BA staff were to enclose Swale's information leaflet explaining the new procedures to help to speed the claim ➤ Direct contacts were set up between Swale and BA /JSP staff to allow effective liaison of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Visit of project team members to BA/JSP to make arrangements. Claim forms and information leaflets delivered for immediate use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Swale Housing Association, Age Concern, Letting Agents, CAB, HAA no longer to issue claim forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Visit by project team members to advise these parties of the new way of working and explain that customers were being encouraged to visit front line office direct. Claim forms would now only be issued by Benefits

Proposed Change	Action required to implement change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Full explanation to be given to all parties if concerns are raised regarding receipt of claim ➤ Remove all stock of claim forms held by parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Customers to leave the Benefits with proof of their entitlement or details of information they must provide to support their claim ➤ Agreement with Age Concern to retain stock of claim forms and to continue with the service they already provided as this was in line with the clean flow process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Presentation session to be held for the Housing Officers of Swale Housing Association to explain the clean flow way of working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Presentation by project team members
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack of engagement by partners ➤ Further confusion to the customer ➤ Claims forms retained and issued without correct information 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Regular liaisons would keep partners informed ➤ Information available at the first point of contact ➤ No claim forms would be issued without adequate assistance to complete
MEASURES:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Measures should be end-to-end times and relate to our purpose – what matters to our customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Staff to be issued with sheets to monitor. ➤ Date the claim/change was taken ➤ Date last information received ➤ Date assessed ➤ Number of days in-between ➤ Actions taken ➤ Reason if there is a delay ➤ Staff to be trained on using Winchart to show capability
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Information could be incomplete ➤ Staff concerns on purposes of measures 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Measures needed to establish if the new processes were working effectively ➤ Staff to be regularly advised of current processing speed of the service
SERVICE RESTRUCTURE:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review the structure of the Housing Benefits section to compliment the new clean flow process ➤ Keep staff advised of project progress and training sessions as new processes introduced ➤ Engagement of UNISON representation where appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To be organised by Head of Service and sponsoring Director ➤ Section meetings to be held as required to inform staff of structure and process changes ➤ UNISON to be consulted throughout the process
<p><i>Risks/consequences of Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Staff concerns on job security/cost cutting exercise ➤ Staff resistance to change ➤ Apprehension on the introduction of the generic type role 	<p><i>Justification to support Re-design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Customer service to be made priority ➤ Staffing needs to reflect and act upon demand ➤ Staff have an independent advice source in UNISON to take any issues forward

The following action plan was compiled as a result of the re-design process and was monitored to ensure target dates were achieved

Redesign	Action	Responsible Officer	Progress
District Offices	Office space required – agreement to use upstairs office space (previously building control)	David Buckett	Agreed and Implemented August 04
	Furniture – Desks to be moved to S/ness	Steve Shrimplin, Nick Saunders.	Implemented August 04
	Phone Lines to be set up S/ness	IT Section	Implemented August 04
	IT to move computers – set up scanners S/ness	IT Section	Implemented August 04
	Health & Safety checks Faversham D/O– To establish if there is enough room at districts to move the assessment officers there.	Soo Barker	Safety check done and agreement to go ahead August 04
	Agreement for Assessment officers to work at districts – possibility of customer contact.	HR/Unison Rep to check contacts.	Implemented August 04
	PID's to be issued to RAT users	Steve Shrimplin	Implemented August 04 and on going
	Assessment officers – training to be given on scanner use.	Lisa Gibbs, Anne Prosser Sonya Field Pauline Young Ginny Wilkinson Zoe Kent.	Implemented August 04
Awareness training for outside partners.	Set up awareness sessions for SHA, CAB, HAA, Age Concern.	Ginny Wilkinson	Meetings held July – August 04. Further training sessions held following full implementation
Awareness training for all staff	Set up awareness sessions to keep staff informed of clean flow procedures and how it is intended to sustain the new way of working	Ginny Wilkinson	Meetings held July – August 04. Further training sessions held following full implementation
Changes in procedures	Guidance notes / training to be given to staff	Ginny Wilkinson	Guidance notes written and issued to all staff July 04
Advising our customers	Flyers to be issued with each new bill explaining our new way of working.	Ginny Wilkinson	March 05 Flyers sent out with each C/Tax bill
Assessment training	Frontline staff to be trained to action simple changes – Team Leader and Training officers to set out training plans.	Rhoda Allinson Ginny Wilkinson	Training sessions & plans ongoing

Redesign	Action	Responsible Officer	Progress
PPS / HBS	Agency staff to work on backlog throughout pilot and support staff through transitional period of new work design and restructure.	Steve Shrimplin, Nick Saunders, David Leaman, David Buckett, Mark Radford	PPS staff retained -backlog & Ctax discrepancies cleared by Dec 04. HBS staff assisted throughout restructure process as vacancies were held pending the outcome
Measures	To set up measuring processes to determine how quickly the authority responds to customer's demands.	Val West / Zoe Kent	Data collection sheets set up. Information transferred to Winchart from July 04 – On going
Reorganisation of HB section	Develop new structure of Benefits. Taking into account new roles and responsibilities.	Steve Shrimplin, Nick Saunders, David Leaman, David Buckett, Mark Radford.	Restructure in place by August 05
Letter redesign	Systems administrator to look at letter design in view of the failure demand received.	Mandy Cox	Project to start April 06

3. Savings and Efficiencies

In an attempt to quantify the impact of the proposed changes, Table C estimates the savings re-design would be expected to make in the terms of manpower and financial impact on revenue budgets

Table C

Details of Savings	Proposed Change	Result of Process Redesign	Impact	Estimated Value
Printing / Stationery Costs	Counters Evidence	Reduction in the number of error related/duplication and unnecessary claim forms and requests for information Claim forms no longer issued by 3 rd parties	Less stock of claim forms printed Overall reduction in budget / costs	2004/05 to 2005/06 £9,953 Reduction in budget for 2006-07 £10,322
Postage	Counters Evidence	Reduction in overall requests for information via assessment	Less correspondence sent out. Savings in postage, paper envelopes	2004/05 to 2005/06 £2,870 Reduction in budget for 2006-07 £3,978

Details of Savings	Proposed Change	Result of Process Redesign	Impact	Estimated Value
Manpower	Restructure	Agency staff engagement minimal in comparison to the changes that have been put in place	Sustained level of service whilst holding vacancies and implementing re-structure of the service –	Payroll savings between 2004/05 to 2005/06 of £48,355
	Restructure	Decrease in the use of Agency staff	Reduced budget costs for agency staff	Agency savings between 2004/05 to 2005/06 of £40,697
	Restructure	No agency costs budgeted for 2006-07 incorporated within overtime budget	Service run within staff establishment	Agency 2006/07 £122,884 (2005/06 actual)
	Restructure	Reduction of payments to staff in relation to overtime	Reduction in cost of providing service	Overtime saving 2004/05 to 2005/06 £21,374 Reduction in budget 2005-06 and 2006-07 £9,290
Manpower	Claim Administration	Team leaders no longer allocate work to assessment officers	Now have a central pool of work and auto assignment process back to officers	1 hour a day saved per day. Total saving of 6 hours per week
	Scanning	Reduction of processing trays from 174 to 4	DC staff quicker at indexing following scanning	1 hour per day per person x 3 DC staff equivalent to 18 hours per week savings
	Counter / Phones	Contact by assessment officer to explain entitlement letter following involved assessment	Less failure demand due to claimants not understanding how assessment had been calculated	20 mins saving per enquiry 22 hours saved per week on counter & telephone

Details of Savings	Proposed Change	Result of Process Redesign	Impact	Estimated Value
Process Efficiencies	Customers encouraged to visit front office	More face to face contact with customers and issues sorted at first point of contact	Reduced need for further contact by telephone	2004-05 and 2005-06 £1,330 savings
	Backdating requests	Backdating identified at the front end processing	Reduction in appeal officer time and re-assessment	No of appeals and revisions' 04/05 1044. 05/06 469. 535 less received equivalent to 3.7 hours per case. Total saving of 37 hours per week
	Overpayments	The prompt recovery of overpayments	Additional income from the settlement of invoices raised against overpayments	Estimated income for 2005/06 of £18,239
	Subsidy	By being up to date and acting quickly the overpayment is likely to be minimal resulting in less loss of subsidy	Significant reduction in the loss of subsidy Rent Allowance Homeless Rent Council Tax	Savings in 2005/06 £153,280 2.0% 0.38% 1.15%
	Ombudsman Payments	Less payments to be made due to less complaints referred to Ombudsman	Reduced cost in fines	Reduced ex gratia payments but unable to estimate
	Registered Social Landlord Payments (SHA) in lieu of awards owed	No one off payment in lieu of awards (i.e. 2003-04 interest free loan) as there is no longer any backlog of claim assessment	Reduction in financial liability i.e. interest free loans	£2,000,000 advance and accumulative Interest

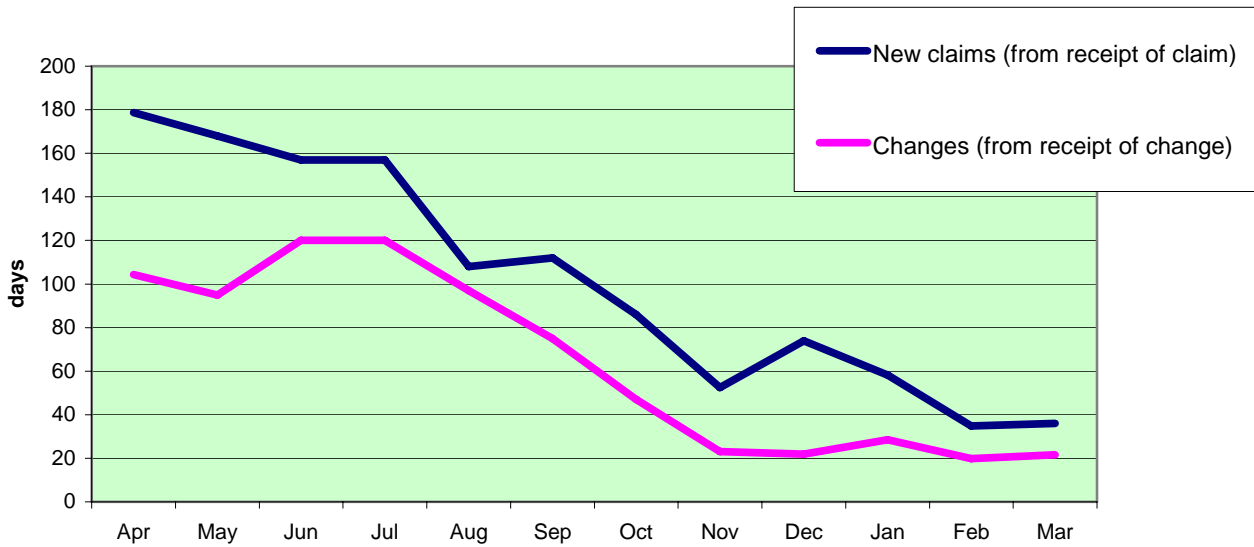
4. A Service Transformed

The implementation of the system approach in July 2004 successfully transformed the processing of Benefits. This can be demonstrated by the following 2004/05 and 2005/06 performance results:-

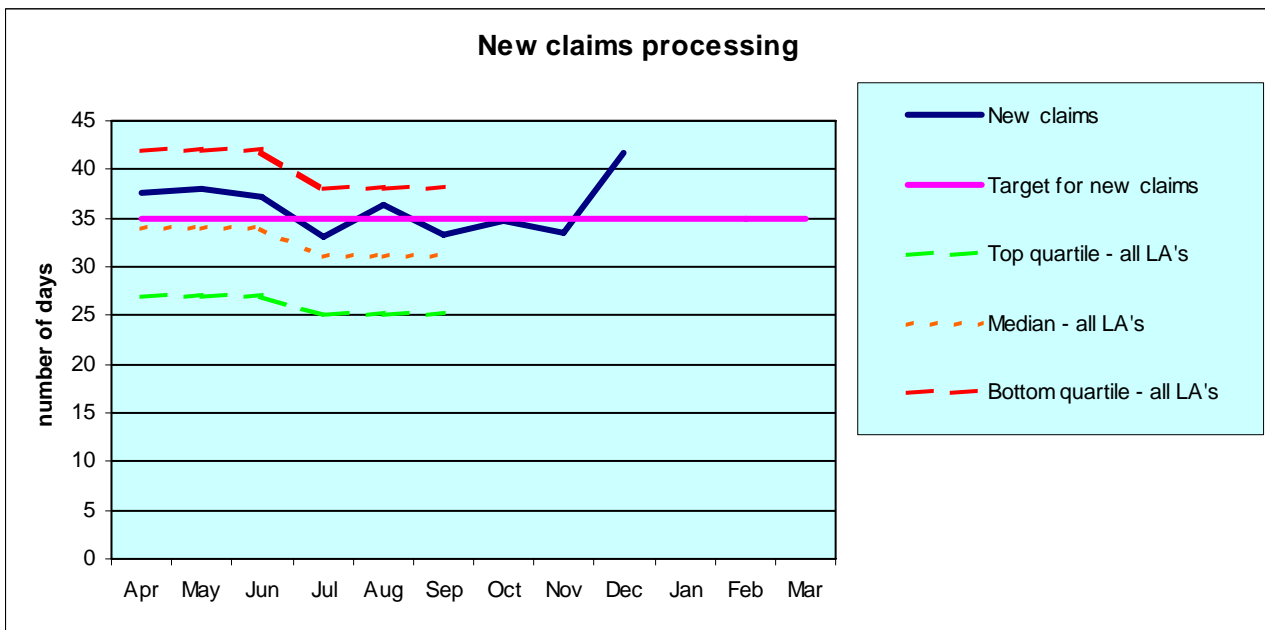
4.1 Claim Processing

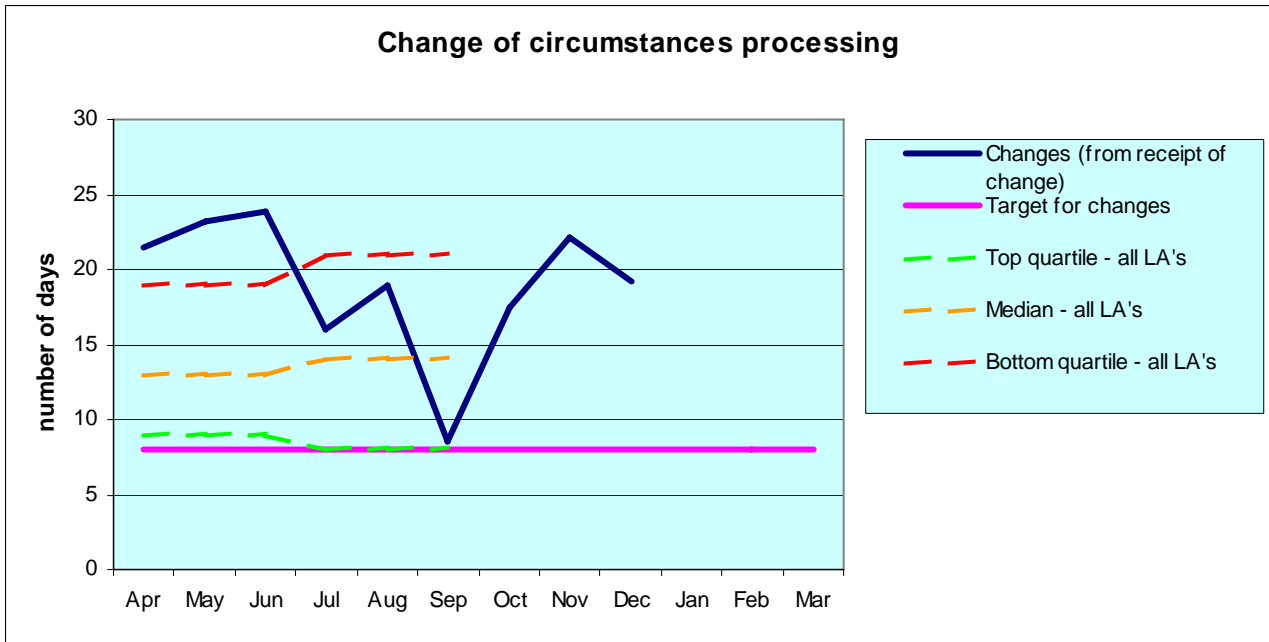
The key performance indicator showing the speed of processing indicated a massive improvement through 2004-05. The authority went from processing new claims within 180 days in April 2004 to 35 days in March 2005. Similarly, the processing of changes of circumstances that was taking over 100 days in April 2004 was reduced to just 20 days in March 2005

Speed of processing 2004- 05



The new way of working maintained the improved performance during 2005/06. The processing of new claims ranged between 38 and 42 days. Investigation into the exceptions exceeding the standard 35 days was found to be due to fraud investigations. Processing of change of circumstances ranged from between 8 to 24 days to completion





Performance is being sustained close to the Performance Standards in these areas.

In respect of visitors to the offices, the numbers during 2004/05 and 2005/06 have not levelled off and averaged approximately 17,700 visits. However by encouraging customers to visit the offices with their “clean” forms and evidence, the high percentage of failure demand initially identified has been turned around to value demand.

The impact of the new way of working on telephone calls received, although they have not reduced significantly, has meant that less staff have been required to man the Benefits call centre. Calls that have been failure demand ie asking if we have received information, have been responded to quickly and with a value response i.e. yes we have received information, we will be acting on this within x days. Additionally there is now less querying of late awards or overpayments enabling the use of staff that would otherwise be engaged on the phones to undertake more value work.

There has been a substantial decrease in the volume of written complaints during 2005. 72 complaints had been recorded during 2003, 61 complaints in 2004 but only 16 complaints during 2005 providing evidence of improved customer satisfaction in the service provided.

4.2 Revision of clean flow process

The introduction of new processes worked well initially. There has only had to be one major change and this was to the scanning process. It was found that not scanning the high volume of post received within the claim administration team created problems with visibility. Staff also lost ownership for processing in working this way. This was recognised when there was a period of system down time and when staff were unable to keep the processing up to date due to the volume of incoming post and electronic demand. This was a particular issue in February 2005 when staff numbers were limited due to the snowy weather conditions.

The impact of not scanning post on receipt created waste as staff were searching around for documents that were on assessment officers desks following enquiry by the customer. The post could not be processed due to the system downtime. It was also found that not scanning also created duplication of work, customers that sent in documentation on different days meant assessment staff could be working on the same case at the same time

A decision was made that the main post, with the exception of claim forms, that came into Claim Administration would be scanned on receipt. All district offices however, at Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness were to continue scanning the post at the back end of the process after it had been worked. To justify the change a new process was introduced to enable all claim administration staff to work on scanned images. If there was a need for further information, and they could not contact the

customer by telephone, then any correspondence on the pended claim would be referenced back to the originating officer therefore giving ownership of a case

The revised clean flow process and system picture has been documented in Appendix C

4.3 Debt Recovery

Other key performance areas have also improved such as in debt recovery, appeals processing, processing accuracy and investigations activity.

Although the clean stream flow focused on changes and new claims, the impact of the work being promptly undertaken directly influenced the work required in debt recovery. Previously when Claim Administration were behind on the work it was several months before the landlord/claimant were advised of an overpayment. This overpayment could be large due to the delay and would often be difficult to recover i.e. the customer may have moved out of the area. As a result of this our debt recovery was very poor. On occasions landlords were unwilling to pay back the debt whilst outstanding new claims/changes had not been paid.

From the prompt recovery of overpayments, additional income has been estimated at £18,239 for 2005/06 as a result of the settlement of invoices raised against overpayments .

Year	Invoices Raised	No of Invoices	Invoices Recovered	Unrecovered Overpayments
2004/05	£2,044,545	4194	£1,808,716	£235,829
2005/06	£1,169,867	3433	£1,067,916	£110,446
Addition Income Collected equivalent to 2% savings				£18,239

4.4 Subsidy

Prior to the clean stream flow, the length of time of processing the overpayment had normally to be classified as local authority error attracting 0% subsidy. To give an example if we paid claimant x £100 but later decided that they had been overpaid £30, then if the overpayment is local authority error we only claim back £70 from the government in subsidy. Consequently overpayments caused by local authority delay are not only costly for the council in lost subsidy but are difficult to recover from the landlord/claimant. By being up to date and acting quickly the overpayment is likely to be minimal resulting in less loss of subsidy and easier recovery action. The following table clearly shows the significant reduction in the loss of subsidy in 2005/06 compared to 2004/05 in addition to the savings in 2005/06 that can be attributed to the introduction of a system way of working

Subsidy	Year	Lost Subsidy £	% of Total	Savings £	Received Subsidy	Total
Rent Allowances – local authority error on overpayments	2004/05	251,850	0.8		29,859,965	30,111,816
	2005/06	177,016 (E)	0.6		29,415,356 (E)	29,592,372
		Saving	0.2%	£59,722		

Subsidy	Year	Lost Subsidy £	% of Total	Savings £	Received Subsidy	Total
Non HRA (homeless families)	2004/05	8,972	1.08		815,178	824,150
	2005/06	7,246 (E)	0.70		1,056,644 (E)	1,063,890
		Saving	0.38%	£4,244		

Subsidy	Year	Lost Subsidy £	% of Total	Savings £	Received Subsidy	Total
Council Tax Benefit	2004/05	190,227	2.47		7,482,822	7,673,049
	2005/06	103,616	1.32		7,707,347 (E)	7,810,963
		Saving	1.15%	£89,314		

4.5 DWP Performance Standards

In the 2005 DWP Performance Standards Review, this authority scored 3 (75.41%), just 1 mark (0.59%) under the 'excellent' mark of 4 (76%). Since then we have improved our turnaround in the "user focus" section, principally by putting a task force into dealing with the many outstanding appeals. It is anticipated that following this exercise Swale Borough Council will during the next review be marked within the "excellent" bracket

Summary of Performance Standard Scores (October 2005)

Theme	Performance measure	Enablers	Combined
Claim administration	3	3	3
Security	4	4	4
User Focus	1	2	1
Resource management	-	3	-
Overall scores:			
Weight enabled score	75.41%		
Performance Measure score	3		
Enabler score	3		
Overall score	3		

4.6 Improved Management Reporting

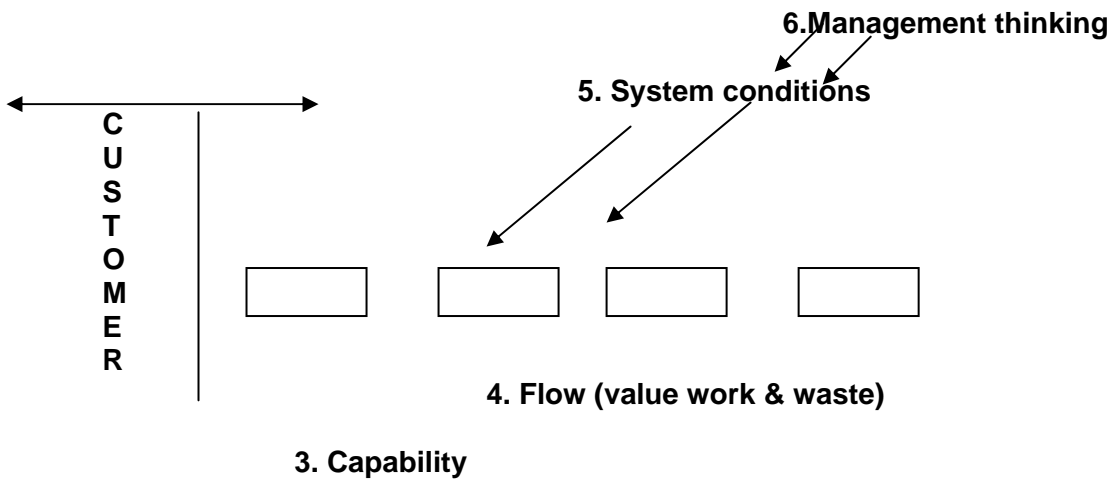
Prior to the new way of working there was inadequate management reporting. There was no way of predicting patterns of work or identifying peaks and troughs in workflow and customer demand. To address this, information is now collated and reported via Winchart, which reports activity on a daily basis and shows variations within the work patterns and allows the planning of resources around this. Winchart also identifies exception cases that exceed the norm (blue moon) that can be investigated and action taken if required.

Report by
 Ginny Wilkinson, Service Improvement Officer
 Sarah Beeching, Internal Auditor
 Steve Shrimplin, Senior Benefit Officer

1st March 2006

Model of 'Check'

1. To pay the correct Benefit on time.



2. Type & Frequency demand.