

## **Customer Access**

### **Updated Libraries Information**

The previous performance report referred only to the situation at Armley Library, and therefore did not provide an accurate picture of footfall for branch libraries managed by Customer Services as part of the Community Hub network. The information that follows rectifies this but does not include results for services that are still managed by City Development: Central Library, School Library Service, Prison Libraries, At Home, and Mobile Libraries.

Due to a number of factors the demand (visits) fluctuates during the year (for example there were 156K visits in February 2016 whereas there were only 211K visits in October 2015). For the year as a whole, the monthly average was 187K.

Within this there has been a mix of some sites showing an increase in demand with others showing a decrease. Further work is ongoing to understand the reasons for this.

The total of visits will be understated slightly as there have been data quality issues in respect of recording visits which is being addressed.

The delivery of ICT sessions has remained relatively stable throughout the year, with 471K sessions delivered (avg. 39K per month).

**See Appendix 1 for the breakdown of monthly figures**

### **Welfare and Benefits – Additional Information**

#### **Council Tax: Single Persons Discount:**

When a Council Tax charge-payer lives alone or is the only person over 18 living at the address, they are entitled to a 25% Single Person Discount. In May, the Council Tax Service commissioned an exercise to carry out additional checks into entitlements to Single Person Discount.

The exercise set out to identify over £500,000 of additional Council Tax revenue for the Council in respect of incorrectly awarded Single Person Discount. The review formed part of the Council's Budget Plan that was agreed by the full Council in February 2015. 60,000 Single Person Discounts were initially selected for review. Of these, 26,421 (44%) were selected for a more formal review following data matching against credit reference records and other sources of information.

The review was completed on 10 March 2016. The net amount raised by way of additional charge excluding 2016/17, was £802,680 against the corporate target of £500,000. The net amount raised by way of additional charge including 2016/17 is £1,307,094.

Work is already in progress for a similar exercise in 2016/17 however as the base size is smaller this year (anticipated to be around 20,000), the target of increased net amount raised as a result of this activity is set at £250,000.

#### **New Homes Bonus:**

New Homes Bonus (NHB) is a Government Scheme to fund Local Authorities for the increase in the number of domestic properties in the Council Tax Valuation List for their area, plus the reduction in the number of empty homes that have been unoccupied for more than 6 months.

The amount of New Homes Bonus funding to the council is calculated from an annual return (CTB1) to the Government which is submitted in October each year, which specifies the number of domestic properties in the valuation list, and the number of long term empty homes on the Council Tax database.

The New Homes Bonus funding is calculated as part of the Government's financial settlement for each Local Authority for the following year. The amount of New Homes Bonus funding calculated for each year continues for the following five years, and therefore the funding is accumulative from year to year over 6 years.

The amount of New Homes Bonus funding for the council in 2016/17 based on the October 2015 CTB1 Return is £3.5 million, which equates to £21 million over the next 6 years. This is in addition to the New Homes Bonus Funding awarded to the council arising from earlier years (e.g. 2014/15, 2013/14, 2012/13) which is also being paid for the following 6 years.

**2016/17 Annual Billing & Upratings (Council Tax & Business Rates & Benefits):**

The Welfare & Benefits Service oversee the Council Tax & Business Rates annual billing exercise alongside the annual Benefit uprating for recipients in receipt of Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support.

Due to its importance, work commences each September with the final activities not concluding until the end of the following April. Activity peaks from January to the end of March with increased system testing, parameter testing & bill and notification design. Such is the size of this activity, it results in 2 day closedown of the core system to allow it to compute new charges and upratings and key officers undertaking late night working to ensure minimal downtime and adherence to schedule.

This year was complicated by the new precept charge for "elderly care" however the unit successfully delivered on time with the accurate billing of £360M for 330,615 Council Tax charge-payers, £396M Business Rate charges for 27,653 businesses and the uprating of 80,000 benefit recipients entitlements.

To maximise postage savings, where relevant, documents are merged e.g. Council Tax bill and Benefit notification (and annual Housing rent letter if a Council Tenant). Alongside, a city wide waste information notice was also included in Council Tax mailings ensuring a significant saving on postal costs that would otherwise get incurred.

**Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme:**

The DWP launched the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) in November 2014 in response to the rising monetary value of Housing Benefit fraud and error (MFVE) with 2013/14 estimates showing a loss of £1.45 billion.

The aims of FERIS are to find as many changes of circumstances which reduce Housing Benefit (HB) entitlement and with particular focus on the high value changes. The scheme doesn't prescribe how to identify changes to entitlement because LAs utilise different methods for risk assessing HB caseloads.

Whilst not mandatory, Leeds elected to participate in the scheme and since its implementation has secured to date £365,096 in start-up and ongoing maintenance funding & £226,691 in performance related bonus payments, a total to date of £591,787, with Quarter 4 performance bonus payment for 15/16 of £50k-£100k still awaited.

The Service is to continue in the scheme in 2016/17.

**Council Tax & Benefit Service Audits:**

In 2015/16, the Service received a number of internal audits. Subject to the findings of the audits, Services are measured to differing levels of assurance as detailed in the table below:

Compliance Assurance – The level of compliance with current internal controls.		
Level		Definitions
1	SUBSTANTIAL ASSURANCE	The control environment has substantially operated as intended although some minor errors have been detected.
2	GOOD ASSURANCE	The control environment has largely operated as intended although some errors have been detected.
3	ACCEPTABLE ASSURANCE	The control environment has mainly operated as intended although errors have been detected.
4	LIMITED ASSURANCE	The control environment has not operated as intended. Significant errors have been detected.
5	NO ASSURANCE	The control environment has fundamentally broken down and is open to significant error or abuse.

The following published feedback was received following the key audits undertaken in 2015/16:

Council Tax Service:	Substantial Assurance
Benefits: Assessment & Payments:	Substantial Assurance
Benefits: Reconciliations:	Substantial Assurance
Local Welfare Support Scheme:	Substantial Assurance

Running alongside the above, the Benefits Service had its 2014/15 grant claim for £282M signed off by the external auditors in November 2015 and was subsequently approved by the DWP.

**Fareshare**

Fareshare Yorkshire is a charity which redistributes surplus food donated by the food industry, to charities and organisations who provide food and meals to vulnerable people. The Council supports Fareshare to operate a food distribution centre in Leeds distributing food to the cities foodbanks and cereals to Leeds schools.

During the last financial year Fareshare provided emergency food provision to families through the Local Welfare Support Scheme. This has proved to be successful and is planned to continue during 2016/17.

Fareshare now provides cereals to School Clusters covering 92 schools and Children’s Centres. The aim is to meet the needs of all schools in the city to ensure all children have access to a breakfast before they start their day of learning.

**Universal Credit**

Universal credit went live in Leeds on 1st February 2016. Initially, only newly unemployed single people will be required to claim the new benefit and so numbers will be restricted. By the end of March 2016, 940 people were getting universal credit in Leeds. A scrutiny enquiry was conducted on the new benefit during 2015/16 and the recommendations from this enquiry will be subject to further scrutiny reports during 2016/17 as universal credit continues to expand in Leeds.

## **Credit Union Developments**

During the quarter ending March 2016 the total value of new lending was £1.1m and the total Leeds loan book is £8.8m. Leeds credit union membership is currently 31,000. 'Your Loan Shop' has been in operation for about 18 months. Loans for the last quarter via the shop totalled £87,469.

A scheme was launched this quarter to support the expansion of Credit Union School Savings Clubs within primary schools across Leeds. Under the scheme, all pupils entering key stage two will be offered a £10 contribution towards opening a credit union account. This would only be available to pupils in schools that have agreed to establish a school savings club and is designed to incentivise schools and pupils to become involved in managing their own credit union account, alongside the work of schools to provide greater education to pupils about the importance of saving and financial matters.

A web based Pay Day loan product has been launched charging credit union rates, not the thousands of percent still being charged by the commercial payday sector.

A new credit union website has been developed and is due to be launched in the next quarter. The site is mobile/tablet friendly and contains an improved calculator and on line banking section. The loan decisions tools is now more efficient and the membership form quicker, which also integrates the identity check.

## **Gambling Research**

In November 2016 Global Gaming Ventures Leeds Ltd (GGV) are due to open the large casino as part of the Victoria Gate development in the city centre. As part of their licensing agreement, GGV are committed to fund a monitoring programme which will assess the impact of the casino and try to identify any impacts on problem gambling. The first stage of this process involves carrying out a baseline study in Leeds to understand the current prevalence of problem gambling in the city. Leeds Beckett's University have been appointed as consultants to carry out a research study. The study will allow LCC to monitor the impact of the casino in the city and help target resources to mitigate any potential harm.

In April 2016 the Gambling Commission brought in a licensing change which requires gambling operators to carry out a local risk assessment. The Commission's Guidance for Licensing Authorities (GLA) recommended that local authorities create Local Area Profiles in order to provide operators with local information about an area, which they can then use to assess risks in the locality of their premises. To assist the Licensing Team with this requirement, the Financial Inclusion Team prepared a mapping tool by working together with colleagues in Policy and Intelligence. This tool has mapped local data and intelligence such as crime, unemployment, deprivation, schools, emergency accommodation, ethnicity and licenced premises. Although initially prepared as a Licensing requirement, the tool may become useful for locality work across the Council.

Addendum to Citizens and Communities 2015/16 Q4 Performance Report

**Appendix 1**

**Libraries Services Delivered through the Community Hub Network**

	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>August</b>	<b>September</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>December</b>	<b>January</b>	<b>February</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Total no. of items issued</b>	157,499	159,900	154,622	181,072	181,439	171,094	169,478	154,619	129,469	133,345	132,894	147,582	1,873,013
<b>Visits</b>	201,041	184,303	186,089	208,272	204,056	207,517	211,499	187,036	162,105	174,300	156,590	160,151	2,242,959
<b>ICT Sessions</b>	40,254	39,595	41,616	42,161	40,827	42,758	43,445	38,479	30,907	36,760	37,521	37,070	471,393