

## PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

**Subject:** Revenues and Benefits Performance Update  
**Committee:** Cabinet Planning  
**Date:** March 2013  
**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Lowry  
**CMT Member:** Adam Broome (Director for Corporate Services)  
**Author:** Martine Collins, Strategic Manager Revs and Benefits  
**Contact details:** Tel: 01752 304118  
Email: martine.collins@plymouth.gov.uk

**Ref:**

**Key Decision:** No

**Part:** I

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### **Purpose of the report:**

To provide Cabinet with an update on the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Service.

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### **Corporate Plan 2012 – 2015:**

The Revenues and Benefits Service significantly contributes to the inequalities agenda ensuring that the most vulnerable residents of Plymouth receive the appropriate benefit entitlement. Also strong links into value for communities.

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### **Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land:**

The council administers housing benefit subsidy of c.£100m per annum.

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### **Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management:**

- An effective Revenues and Benefits Service helps address inequalities through ensuring that vulnerable residents receive appropriate benefit entitlement.
- The service undertakes annual benefit take up campaigns which are targeted to areas of greatest need.

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### **Equality and Diversity:**

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

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### **Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:**

Cabinet planning are asked to note the progress made by the service since the implementation of a new structure in November 2011.

Due to the improvements in performance it is recommended that the report no longer go to Cabinet, but continues to be an item for cabinet planning.

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**Alternative options considered and rejected:**

None

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**Published work / information:**

None

**Background papers:**

None

Title	Part I	Part II	Exemption Paragraph Number							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

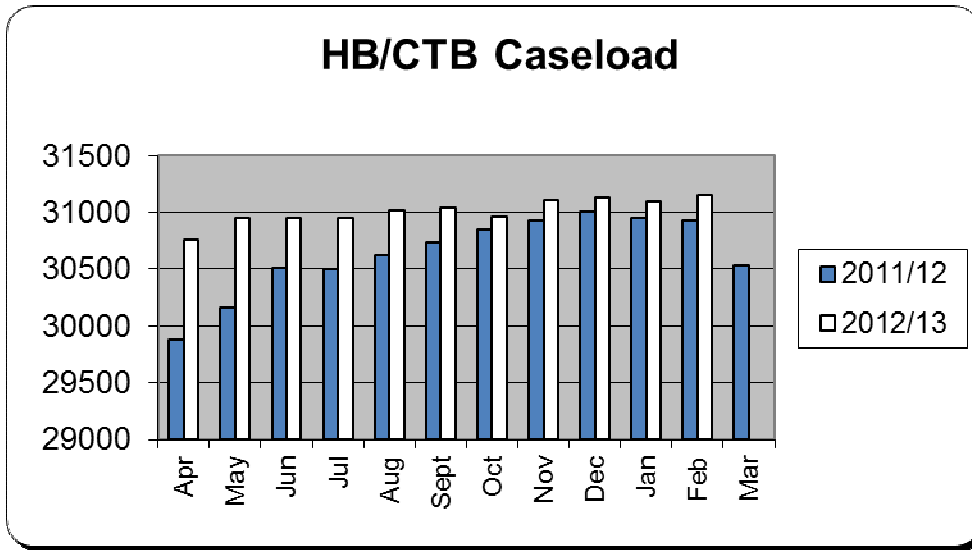
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**Sign off:**

Fin		Leg		Mon Off		HR		Assets		IT		Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member													
Has the Cabinet Member(s) agreed the content of the report? Yes / No													

## Housing Benefit

### Number of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit claimants

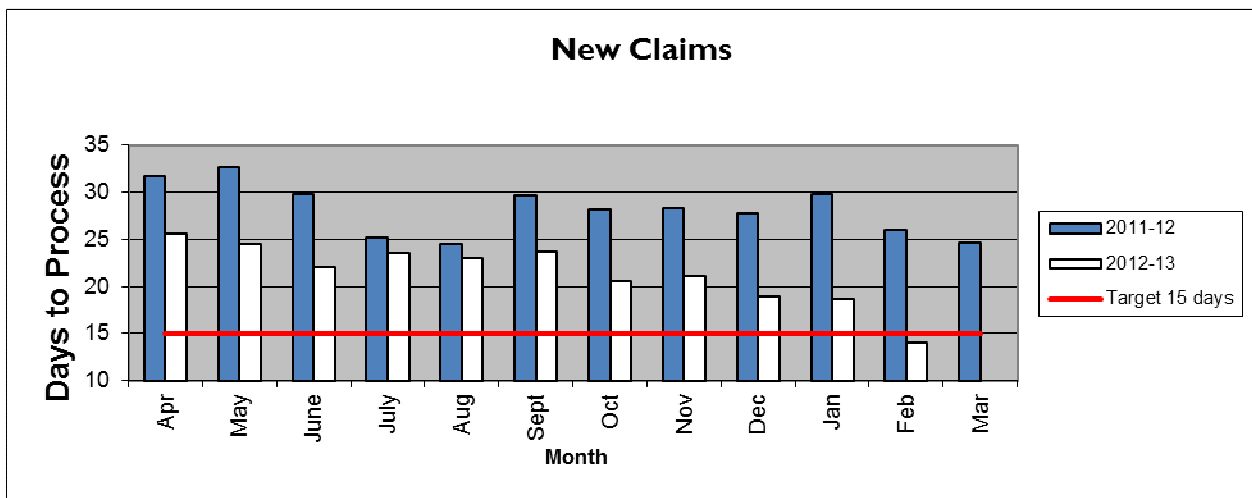


	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2012/13	30754	30945	30953	30952	31015	31040	30,982	31,108	31,130	31,091	31,155	
2011/12	29879	30165	30505	30504	30621	30737	30853	30929	31004	30952	30923	30528

The number of people in receipt of Housing and Council Tax Benefit increased during February by 64 (0.20%). The average caseload per Plymouth City Council FTE staff member is more than 1,000 which is above average compared with other Councils.

### Processing of New Claims

■ Target 15 days – February 14.04 days



	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2012	25.62	24.49	22.09	23.54	23.05	23.73	20.51	21.07	18.94	18.54	14.04	18
2011	31.74	32.70	29.74	25.19	24.47	29.70	28.13	27.71	27.71	29.77	26.05	24.68



### Forecast Processing Times

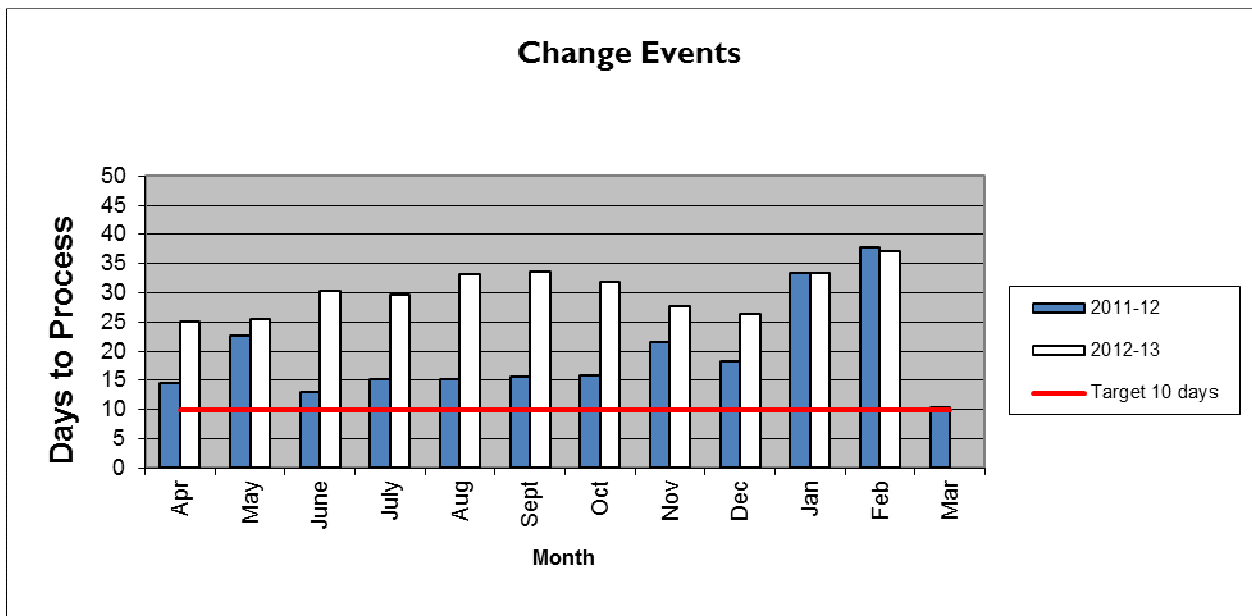
February saw a further reduction in the number of days to process new claims which has seen the department exceed what was a very challenging target for this year. The department is now well ahead of the all Council average of 24 days and is achieving the best processing times it has ever seen.

During March we may see a slight increase in processing times due to the introduction of Welfare Reforms, but we have plans in place and are working hard to avoid this. Increases are more likely to be on change of circumstances as welfare reform begins to impact.

### Processing of Change Events



**Target 10 days – February 37.02 days**



	<u>Apr</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>Jun</u>	<u>Jul</u>	<u>Aug</u>	<u>Sept</u>	<u>Oct</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>Mar</u>
<b>2012</b>	<b>25.05</b>	<b>25.41</b>	<b>30.23</b>	<b>29.73</b>	<b>33.08</b>	<b>33.86</b>	<b>31.89</b>	<b>27.69</b>	<b>26.36</b>	<b>33.47</b>	<b>37.02</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2011</b>	14.58	22.57	12.94	12.12	15.15	15.62	15.73	18.34	18.34	33.36	37.82	10.28



### Forecast Processing Times

As expected February saw a drop in the number of days to process changes as the impact of the final ATLAS backlog was cleared. This situation will now improve and our processing times for the last week of February and beginning of March are indicating a reduction to around 20 days, which will be significant progress. However we are expecting the impact of welfare reform to affect changes processing times during March as customer demand increases and therefore will not realise the full benefits associated with clearing ATLAS until later.

## Welfare Reform Resource Planning

All customers who are going to be affected by the introduction of Council tax Support were issued with detailed letters and frequently asked questions to explain the changes. A team of staff have been proactively calling customers and by week beginning 4 March a total of 4763 customers had been contacted out of the 16,000 affected.

During our responses we had some customers who were refusing to pay, however the majority understood that they needed to pay and were willing to set up payment plans that fell in line with their benefits payments. The majority of customers were also aware of the changes which demonstrated that our efforts to raise awareness have been successful.

We are continuing to make contact with those affected and will be diverting resources to manage main billing during March. However all staff are briefed to discuss the changes with customers and we will continue to discuss payments plans.

We have also been running a number of drop-in sessions in the Civic Centre and will be running a joint open day on 8<sup>th</sup> March, where customer can get advice and support across a range of the welfare changes from the Council, Social Landlords and the Job Centre.

We are expecting a significant increase in calls during the latter part of March once Council Tax bills are received by customers as a result of the Council Tax Technical Reforms and Council Tax Support.

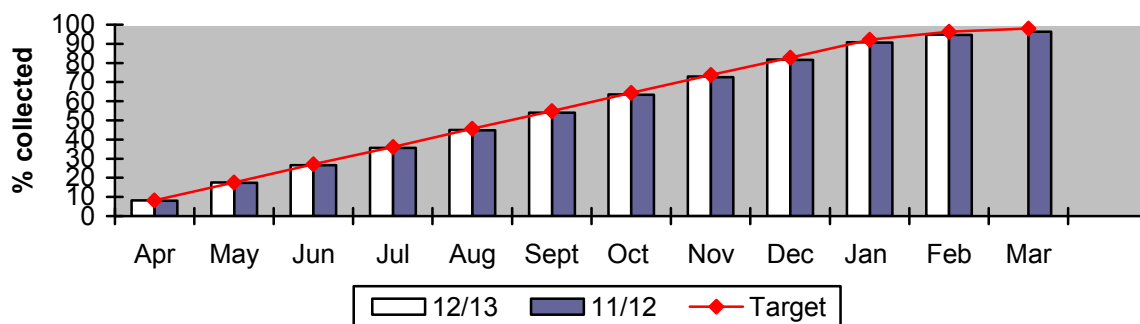
## Collection Rates

### Council Tax

- Net Collectable Debt 2012/13           £93,653m
- Collection Target 2012/13                98 %
- Monthly Target = 96.24%               £89,990m
- Collection Rate = 94.87%               £88,686m

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
12/13 (%)	8.25	17.53	26.53	35.70	44.95	54.07	63.60	72.87	81.80	90.85	94.87	96.6%
11/12 (%)	8.07	17.31	26.62	35.61	44.85	54.04	63.34	72.60	81.54	90.71	94.68	96.30
Target (%)	8.22	17.61	27.06	36.19	45.57	54.90	64.34	73.74	82.82	92.15	96.24	98.00

**% of Council Tax collected**



Council Tax collection has continued to improve during February, we are now 0.19% ahead of last year. This is lower than our forecast of 96.24%.

We continue to telephone customers falling into arrears to promote payment and avoid recovery action. This is reducing the number of summons being issued and securing payments which would otherwise go through the recovery cycle.

We are also actively contacting customers affected by the introduction of Council Tax Support to actively promote payments for 2013/14.

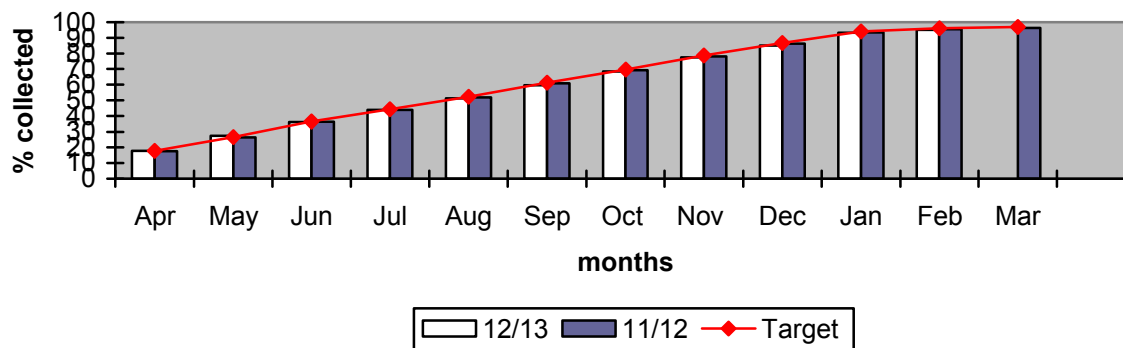
### National Non Domestic Rates

- Net Collectable Debt 2012/13           £88,024m
  - Collection Target 2012/13               96.90%
- Monthly Target = 96.08%               £83,515m  
 Collection Rate = 95.07%               £82,635m

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
12/13 (%)	17.82	27.46	36.11	43.95	51.20	59.66	68.48	77.41	85.20	93.15	95.07	96.63
11/12 (%)	17.63	26.48	36.17	43.80	51.84	60.85	69.23	78.14	86.19	93.52	95.49	96.21
Target (%)	17.74	26.69	36.48	44.22	52.28	61.31	69.73	78.66	86.73	94.09	96.08	96.90

NOTE: Target of 96.90% is a revision from 97.50% after taking into account the business rates deferral scheme where businesses can defer payment of their rates for 2 years.

### % Of NNDR Collected



Collection of business rates has dropped slightly during February and is now 1.01% below target. The drop is in part due to some large refunds due to appeals against rateable value. Proactive recovery work and a revised recovery timetable have tightened our recovery processes to help improve our overall position which we expect to show an improvement next month.

Many authorities are seeing a reduction in the collection of business rates as the economic climate continues to be a challenge, but we continue to focus on proactive recovery to improve the situation.