



INFORMATION SHEET

Audit Committee

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Revenues and Benefits Information

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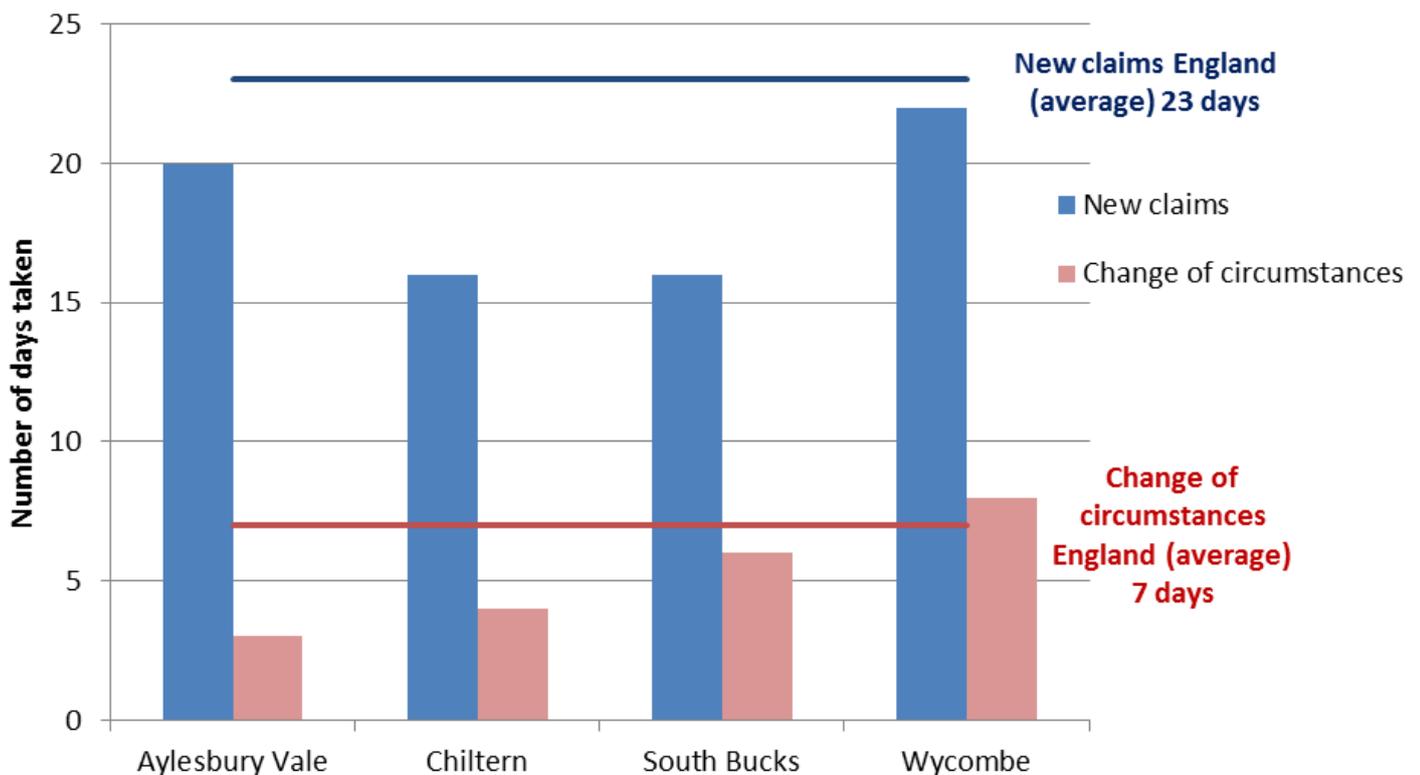
Processing Housing / Council Tax Reduction benefit claims

The graph and table below show the amount of days taken to process new claims or change of events for housing benefit or council tax reduction benefit claims. Days are calculated from the date the claim is received to the date the claim is assessed, which includes time taken by claimants to supply required documentary evidence (and weekends). New applications tend to take longer to process as data has to be processed and verified from several sources.

District Council	2015/16		August 2016
	Days taken to process new claims	Days taken to process changes of events	Number of claimants
Aylesbury Vale	20	3	8,395
Chiltern	16	4	3,347
South Bucks	16	6	2,498
Wycombe	22	8	7,744
England (average)	23	7	-

The growing complexity of benefit assessment due to continued legislative changes including Government changes to the benefit cap has increased workload for the team. This coupled with checking of work (to increase accuracy levels) has impacted on output levels. The benefits team has a core in-house team which processes benefit applications. The team also has arrangements in place to use external services such as LGSS to process benefit applications when necessary. The current in month figures for December 2016 are 18.9 days for new claims and 8.7 days for change of circumstances.

These factors should be measured against the significant cuts in Government funding. In 2013/14 the administration subsidy for administration of housing benefits



was £896,000. This has fallen to £574,000 in the current year, which effectively means WDC is subsidising this prescribed service. The total cost of the service is £1.5m (including administration of council tax reduction which is a local cost).

Council Tax and National non domestic rate

The graph and table below show the amount of Council tax (CT) and national non domestic rate (NNDR) collected by Wycombe District Council and neighbouring Buckinghamshire authorities; as well as the average for England.

The amount of CT and NNDR collected by WDC during 2015/16 is similar to neighbouring district and above the national average in England.

District Council	2015/16	
	% of CT Collected	% of NNDR collected
Aylesbury Vale	98.2	99.4
Chiltern	99.3	98.3
South Bucks	97.9	98.8
Wycombe (Actual)	98.0 (Target 98.4)	98.5 (Target 98.8)
England (average)	97.1	98.2



As at 31 March 2016 the value of arrears for National non domestic collection rate was £1,000,000 (1.4%); the value of arrears for Council Tax was £2,000,000 (2%). Arrears are calculated by subtracting the amount collected from the total net collectable debt for that year. It should be noted that in some cases payments can carry over into the next financial year.

The key reasons that we are unable to collect 100% in both categories are:

- Customers with low income requiring additional time to pay
- Absconders (those who have vacated a property without leaving a forwarding address) can be difficult and time consuming to trace.
- Bankruptcies and liquidations

A summary of the recovery process is outlined below.

Step 1: A bill is sent out to the customer (14 days before first instalment is due)

Step 2: A reminder is sent out to the customer if payment is not received by the due date. A maximum of two reminders will be issued within a financial year.

Step 3: A final notice is sent out to the customer; which requires the customer to pay the full outstanding amount

Step 4: If customer does not make payment a court summons is issued to the customer (14 days before Court date)

Step 5: Action taken to recover the amount due (preferably a payment arrangement but can include attachment to earnings or enforcement agents)

Reminder notices are usually sent out monthly.

Increasing our recovery rates

The best way to increase recovery rates would be to encourage more customers to use the self-serve facilities. This will reduce the workloads and allow processing staff to concentrate on collecting hard to collect debts (more frequent chasing, follow up and policing of outstanding debts).

To encourage residents to use the self-serve facilities we will be sending out more information with the council tax bills this year; steering them towards our website to pay their bills i.e. we are no longer sending direct debit mandates direct to residents but asking for them to completed online.