

Councillors Briefing Note No. 73

Department: Chief Executive's

Further Enquiries to: Ian P Brown

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Re: Implementation of New Software for Housing and Council Tax Benefit Claims

As part of its continuous improvement Wiltshire Council is changing the way in which it administers claims for housing and council tax benefit.

The service currently operates different software in each former district and we have chosen the Northgate solution which is currently in use at the north hub. Through the introduction of a new computer system, all claims formerly dealt with by the district councils in Wiltshire will be administered on one system. This means residents can contact any former council office and have their claim or query dealt with by any of our staff.

The change involves the merge of data held on all four systems and this merger will take place throughout November. In council tax terms the merger will create the 9th largest council tax database in England holding records on 202,000 domestic properties, 14,000 non-domestic properties and will enable the management of 32,000 benefit claims. It will enable the collection of £245 million council tax, £126 million in non-domestic rates and payout £132 million in housing and council tax benefit, this year.

Paying benefit is a vital service to some of the most vulnerable members of our community. In order to create time to merge data we are making advance payments, at the end of October and paying some claims until 5 December, then closing down legacy systems in the south, east and west. This means claims will not be amended or processed in three of the four hubs until the merge has been completed at the end of November 2011. This may mean you get queries regarding the process, if there are any technical queries or urgent matters please refer them to Ian Brown (Head of Revenues and Benefits) on 34743 or via the Internal email system (note it is Ian P Brown as there are two).

The project is being lead through the council's approach to project management, and as such there is a Lead Member (Cllr Pip Ridout), along with an in-house specialists

team from revenues and benefit who have over seen every aspect of the project with considerable help from the council's IT team, finance team and a dedicated project manager.

Every effort will be made to reduce down time and to resume normal working as soon as is practical. The change will enable the council to provide a more responsive and cohesive service and will certainly save money. As part of our process of continual improvement, further changes are now possible, including a new dedicated telephone line for council and another for housing benefits, will also be announced toward the end of the year.