



**Performance and Finance Select
Committee**

18th January 2006

**Report from the Director of Finance
and Corporate Resources**

For Information

Wards Affected:
ALL

Report Title: Revenue and Benefits Performance

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines performance in relation to the Housing Benefit service and a summary of performance in relation to Council Tax and Business Rates collection. Performance is shown as at 30 November 2005. Where the figures are available, an update is included for performance at 31 December 2005.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the priorities outlined for the next quarter and the continued need to prioritise the processing of new applications.
- 2.2 Members are asked to note plans to implement the new applications module of the Verification Framework in 2006/07 and the likely impact of this on new application processing times.
- 2.3 Members are asked to note that there will be a number of benefit claims terminated in the final quarter of 2005/06 following failures by customers to return postal review forms or to make contact with the service following an attempted visit.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Summary of General position

The replacement document image processing system, View 360, went live on 14th November and has generally been a successful implementation, despite some teething problems. Staff have responded well to the system which has brought significant improvements in terms of work allocation and prioritisation and in clarity of management information. Appendix A provides further details about the benefits of the new V360 system, for Member's information. This was requested at the last meeting.

3.2 The amount of work outstanding has risen since implementation, due partly to the way that the new system counts all work items (documents) outstanding rather than cases, and also as staff have had to become used to the new system. However, good progress has been made in the key area of new claims processing, where backlogs are reducing and processing times improving (see further details in paragraphs 3.14 – 3.18 and Tables 1 and 2). A number of pro-active measures have been implemented to bring about further improvements in this area.

3.3 The Service has recently recruited to two senior posts a new Head of Benefits and Service Development Manager who will help to move the service forward further. Consideration is currently being given to the structures and resources required to enable further development and capacity building to face the challenges ahead, not least those presented by the implementation of the new claims module of the Verification Framework.

3.4 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

As has been previously reported, the Service achieved a CPA score of 3 for 2005 against the DWP's Performance Standards, which had themselves been revised earlier in the year to constitute a "harder test" than previously. The service has maintained this score through the year to date and is aiming to achieve a maximum 4 score by the end of the financial year. There is a much heavier weighting now given to performance against key indicators such as processing times for new applications and change in circumstances. We have made significant progress in improving processing times for new applications and are on course to achieve our Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) target of 36 days by 31 March 2006.

3.5 Processing times for change in circumstances have been affected by various changes to regulations and currently only score 2. The DWP have however been reviewing the change in circumstances performance measure to ascertain whether the scoring bandings need

to be amended to reflect the changes in Regulations. The outcome of this review is not yet known but should be clarified in the new year, as this will be required to facilitate our CPA self assessment for 2006.

3.6 The 2005 CPA score was based on 1st quarter performance only. It is still not clear what methodology the DWP will use to establish next year's score, though if a similar methodology to last year is used the Service would hope to achieve a 4 score for 2006.

3.7 Priorities for Quarter 4 2005/06 and beyond

The single most important component of the CPA score is the speed of processing New Claims, and this area is also the subject of the Service's LPSA target to process claims on average within the national target of 36 days over the year. Consequently, considerable focus has been put into this area recently and this will continue until the end of the year. This has included instigating more robust procedures; staff training; more pro-active measures for contacting customers, particularly by telephone, to support written correspondence; quality checking and other corrective measures to eliminate bad practice. These measures have already seen improvements in processing times in November and December compared to previous months.

3.8 The Service has proposed a Local Area Agreement (LAA) for the three years commencing 2006/07, again focusing on improving claim processing times. The details of this are currently being negotiated.

3.9 The Service's biggest challenge in 2006/07 will be the implementation of the New Claims module of the Verification Framework, whilst attaining and maintaining a 4 CPA score. Having successfully implemented the Reviews and Visits modules this year, the New Claims module will enable the Service to prevent fraud and error entering the system far more effectively as well as assisting consistency and quality assurance generally. It will also of course complement the existing modules which seek to identify fraud and error which are already in the system.

3.10 A major element of the new application module is the need for more rigorous verification of customer's supporting evidence, before claims can be processed. Customers will be required to provide original documents as opposed to copies and additional documentation to substantiate their circumstances, such as bank statements showing salary payments in addition to wages slips. Housing Benefit assessing staff will be required to systematically cross check claims against other systems, such as the electoral register and housing rents. The additional validation of claims will help to reduce fraud and error but is also likely to increase processing times, particularly in the early stages of implementation. We expect processing times to increase in 2006 but then to begin to reduce in 2007 when the module has been fully bedded in.

3.11 We are still awaiting details of the national roll-out of the Local Housing Allowance for private sector tenants (and proposed piloting in the social sector), whereby flat-rate allowances for different sizes of accommodation will be used in the Benefits calculation, and the majority of tenants will be paid benefit direct to themselves rather than their landlord. This will provide considerable administrative, systems and cultural challenges to tenants, landlords and staff.

3.12 However, although the Housing Benefit Bill enabling this roll-out was due to be put before Parliament before Christmas, indications are now that it will not appear until at least Easter. It is also unclear as yet whether changes will be made to the pilot schemes currently being run in 18 “pathfinder” authorities for the national roll-out. A further more detailed briefing will be provided when the details become known.

3.13 Age profile of outstanding work

Table 1 below illustrates the age profile of work items (documents) outstanding as at 21/12/05. (Diarised items pending further information from customers are excluded.)

3.14 Considerable work has been undertaken to clear backlogs and in particular the aged work; now 78% of outstanding work is within three months old compared to 68% in October. For new claims, 95% is less than 3 months old. There has also been significant reduction of the appeals backlog.

Aged profile of outstanding benefit processing work : Table 1

Month	New claims	Cancellations	Change in circs	Appeal	Other	Total items of work
January 2005	None	1	7	4	28	40
February 2005	None	None	2	1	9	12
March 2005	1	None	1	None	12	14
April 2005	None	None	4	None	17	21
May 2005	2	None	12	None	25	39
June 2005	6	3	26	None	224	259
July 2005	3	None	25	None	512	540
Aug 2005	6	4	106	3	490	609
Sept 2005	4	4	254	3	259	524
Oct 2005	18	9	505	2	468	1002
Nov 2005	105	25	1569	5	639	2343
Dec 2005	333	35	2908	15	1097	4388
Total	478	81	5419	33	3780	9791

3.15 It can be seen that there are 2511 items of work relating to reported changes in circumstance received before December 2005. Procedures are in place to suspend payments when a change is reported, if this is likely to reduce the customer's entitlement to benefit. This prevents an overpayment arising unnecessarily. There are currently about 2000 claims with suspended payments. Plans for clearing the aged backlog of change in circumstances are being developed for 2006/07. These include redesign of processes to improve the effectiveness of these and further development of the View 360 package to automate tasks where possible.

3.16 The other significant area of aged work relates to postal reviews implemented under the Verification Framework. There are about 1697 outstanding items of work outstanding in relation to these and about 587 items of work outstanding in relation to visits. The backlog of visit assessments and postal reviews is being steadily reduced and is aimed to be cleared by the beginning of March 2006.

3.17 Best Value Performance Indicators

Table 2 below shows performance against Best Value Performance Indicators for 2003/04, 2004/05 and 2005/06 to date, including a projection of this year's third quarter performance. (The quarter 1 figures reflect the revised figures submitted to the DWP as explained in November's report.)

3.18 Our average processing time for new applications has improved over the third quarter, which is projected to hit the target of 36 days (performance is projected at 35 days for December). The year to date figure is 38 days which still means a significant reduction in processing times is required in Quarter 4 in order to meet the annual LPSA target. We will continue to proactively prioritise new applications to ensure this happens.

Best Value Performance Indicators : Table 2

BVPI	2003/4 Performance	2004/5 Performance	2005/6 Target	2005/6 Q1 (April – June)	2005/6 Q2 (July - Sept)	2005/6 Q3 (Oct – Dec) (projected)
Average days to process new claims	56 days	47 days	36 days	39 days Revised	37 days	36 days
Average days to process a change in circumstances	34 days	22 days	< 20 days	22 days Revised	20 days	20 days
Percentage of claims processed accurately	97%	98%	98 %	99%	98%	98%

3.19 Verification framework progress

Progress against both Verification Framework and CPA targets for this area, has been good. As at 28 December 12039 interventions had been initiated, with 6965 completed. About 1600 reminders are being sent to customers who have not returned a completed postal review form. Payments will be suspended after 14 days if the customer does not respond to the reminder and the claim will be terminated within a month of suspension, if no contact is made. There are additionally

about 600 customers who were visited but were not available to verify their current circumstances. If these customers have not made contact with the Authority, in accordance with the correspondence left at the time of the attempted visit, then payments will be suspended and eventually terminated. There is therefore, likely to be a number of claim terminations arising in the final quarter of the year.

- 3.20** In the early stages of implementation, there were a very high percentage of interventions resulting in overpayments. This has reduced as the year has progressed, and analysis is currently showing about 60% of interventions identifying a change to the customer's circumstances. The average value of overpayments has also reduced and we have seen a levelling of the value of overpayments created.

Overpayments

- 3.21** Overpayment recovery has continued to improve and is currently on course to achieve £3.85M by the end of the financial year, which will be the highest level ever achieved. The table below summarises performance

- 3.22** The target for this financial year is to recover £3.7M in contrast to the £3.3 million achieved during 2004/05. The increase in target part way through the year is as a direct result of an increase in the level of overpayments raised due to the Verification Framework, in the first quarter of this financial year. Table 3 below gives a breakdown of overpayments recovered in the current financial year.

Overpayment Recovery –Table 3

	2004 / 05	End Dec 2005	End Dec 2004
Recovery from Ongoing Housing Benefit	£1.376M	£1.326M	£1.048M
Composite Recovery (* See below)	£598,936	£307K	£349K
Cash Recovery (Invoice)	£1.335M	£1.270M	£923K
Total Recovery	£3.311M	£2.903M	£2.321M

(*) Composite recovery is the recovery of a Housing Benefit Overpayment owed by a landlord from the ongoing benefit of another of their tenants.

- 3.23** Additional resource was recruited to the Overpayments Team in 2004/05 to focus on recovery and good results have been achieved. We have now recruited two further agency staff to further increase our capacity to chase debtors. We will review the impact of these staff at

the end of the year in order to evaluate whether it will continue to be cost effective to retain them.

3.24 During 05/06 we are continuing to focus on Composite Recovery whilst continuing with County Court action (we have been granted around 65 County Court Judgements), expanding our Collection Agency pilot, and taking steps to minimising the incidence of Overpayments.

3.25 Performance measurement of Overpayments in terms of BVPIs has changed this year in that we are measured both on our recovery performance against current year debt, but also against arrears. Table 4 below shows our performance year to date. We intend to carry out some benchmarking against other authorities. It will mean that careful consideration will need to be given to the management of bad debt.

Table 4: Best Value Performance Indicators for overpayments

Overpayment PM's 2005-06

	Apr-05	May-05	Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05	Dec
PM 7	70.59 %	55.61 %	56.22 %	65.96 %	67.06 %	70.91 %	79.54 %	66.83 %	69.43 %
PM 8	5.19%	9.86%	16.87 %	22.74 %	26.47 %	30.77 %	34.73 %	33.83 %	36.03 %
PM 9	0.21%	0.35%	0.49%	0.60%	0.72%	0.82%	0.92%	0.90%	1.16%

Table 5: Best Value Performance Indicators definitions

PM7	The amount of HB overpayments recovered during the period being reported on, as a percentage of HB deemed recoverable overpayments during that period
PM8	HB overpayments recovered during the period as a percentage of the total amount of HB overpayment debt outstanding at the start of the period plus the amount of HB overpayment identified during the period.
PM9	HB overpayments written off during the period as a percentage of the total amount of HB overpayment debt outstanding at the start of the period, plus the amount of HB overpayments identified during the period

3.26 Benefits and Council Tax complaints

Tables 6 and 7 below show recent performance in responding to complaints. Benefits performance has generally improved over the last

three months due to greater focus on target dates and better monitoring systems being utilised.

- 3.27** Performance remains high on Council Tax complaints despite increased numbers being received, due mainly to stricter enforcement procedures being adopted against non-payers; it will be noted that despite the increased numbers of Council Tax complaints, smaller percentages of these are being upheld than previously.

**Table 6
Complaints**

Benefits

Received	Nov-04	Dec-04	Jan-05	Feb-05	Mar-05	Apr-05	May-05	Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05
Stage 1	48	44	38	60	40	51	44	48	53	55	71	55	64
Stage 2	1	4	3	9	7	8	6	5	13	7	6	8	6
Stage 3	2	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	3	2	1	5	3
Ombudsman	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Total	51	49	41	69	48	61	52	55	70	64	78	69	74
Within Target	Nov-04	Dec-04	Jan-05	Feb-05	Mar-05	Apr-05	May-05	Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05
Stage 1	97%	96%	94%	98%	91%	91%	97%	77%	96%	43%	52%	67%	59%
Stage 2	71%	100%	100%	88%	100%	100%	100%	88%	100%	33%	73%	83%	83%
Stage 3	0%	50%	0%	0%	N/A	100%	N/A	50%	100%	50%	100%	100%	50%
Ombudsman	100%	100%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%
Upheld	Nov-04	Dec-04	Jan-05	Feb-05	Mar-05	Apr-05	May-05	Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05
Stage 1	31%	47%	59%	64%	62%	55%	53%	59%	45%	31%	57%	52%	40%
Stage 2	100%	50%	67%	25%	80%	71%	83%	63%	83%	67%	55%	50%	50%
Stage 3	50%	50%	0%	0%	N/A	0%	N/A	25%	0%	25%	100%	0%	25%
Ombudsman	0%	0%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0%	N/A	N/A	N/A	0%

N/A = none actioned (no complaints processed / upheld within the month). Where 0% shows, none of the complaints processed in the month were within target / upheld.

Council Tax Complaints : Table 7

Received	Nov-04	Dec-04	Jan-05	Feb-05	Mar-05	Apr-05	May-05	Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05
Stage 1	46	33	38	36	45	34	33	32	44	30	44	45	53
Stage 2	16	6	2	3	8	8	9	11	10	7	10	8	12
Stage 3	6	1	2	2	2	3	1	1	3	4	1	3	6
Ombudsman	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	2	0	1	0	1	0
Total	68	40	42	42	55	46	45	46	57	42	55	57	71
Within target	Nov-04	Dec-04	Jan-05	Feb-05	Mar-05	Apr-05	May-05	Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05
Stage 1	96%	100%	93%	92%	95%	96%	100%	97%	93%	93%	89%	92%	89%
Stage 2	75%	100%	100%	100%	67%	100%	100%	63%	58%	60%	67%	100%	100%
Stage 3	N/A	60%	33%	20%	67%	50%	100%	67%	100%	100%	67%	33%	N/A
Ombudsman	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	N/A	100%	100%	50%	0%	N/A	100%	N/A	100%
Upheld	Nov-04	Dec-04	Jan-05	Feb-05	Mar-05	Apr-05	May-05	Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05
Stage 1	21%	27%	22%	11%	14%	24%	21%	16%	15%	24%	8%	16%	9%
Stage 2	25%	29%	14%	0%	50%	50%	20%	38%	46%	0%	38%	43%	11%
Stage 3	N/A	20%	33%	0%	0%	0%	33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	N/A
Ombudsman	N/A	N/A	N/A	0%	N/A	0%	100%	0%	0%	N/A	0%	N/A	0%

Source Respond

3.28 Customer Service

In September 2005 the Brent House Revenue and Benefits Counter Service was transferred to the One Stop Shop. As a result all of the Revenues and Benefits customer service enquires received over the telephone or via a visit from a customer will be dealt with by the One Stop Shop. The tables below provides details of the Brent House One Stop Shop (Revenue and Benefits customers) for October and November 2005.

Table 8: Brent House Counters – November 2005

	Nov 05	Oct 05	Diff
Reception	596	391	+205 (+52%)
Document Desk	2,166	2,277	-111 (-5%)
Main Counter Service Requests.	1,834	1,658	+176 (+11%)
Total	4,596	4,326	+270 (+6%)

Table 9: Comparison of Waiting and Interview times at Brent House

	Nov 05	Oct 05	Diff
Waiting Time	68 mins	83 mins	-15 mins
Interview Time	24 mins	23 mins	+1 min

3.29 It is noted that customer waiting times at Brent House is significantly in excess of the performance target of 20 minutes. Waiting times for the main counter have however reduced by 15 minutes compared to October 2005 and are expected to improve further in January and February 06. New Customer Services Officers have recently been recruited and will start in the New Year.

3.30 At the document desk, customers queued for an average of 19 minutes each, a reduction of 1 minute from October. The average interview time was 26 minutes per customer, an increase of 3 minutes from the previous month.

3.31 OSS Contact Centre Performance – Council Tax Line

Table 10 below shows performance for the Revenue and Benefits Call centre year to date. It can be see that performance has generally been improving as a result of the additional staff recruited with DWP Performance standard funds. The speed of answer percentages relate to calls answered compared to all calls presented. There are still a high number of abandoned and engaged calls however overall call duration has reduced and this will help to improve performance over the next period. November's performance, particularly on speed of answering, was impacted by staff training on View 360 and the Council Tax empowerment matrix.

Revenue and Benefits Call centre performance : Table 10

Total (Ctax + Benefits)	Apr-05	May-05	Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05
Presented to ACD	23182	20158	20813	18035	19665	20832	21861	22126
▶ Answered	19128	15871	16748	15434	18521	18970	19711	17827
▶ Abandoned by customer before answered	3959	4210	4006	2541	1089	1778	2050	4091
▶ Engaged (all lines busy; customer gets engaged tone)	23504	36487	35979	63794	28852	20389	4000	8167
▶ Ans 15 secs	7200	3168	4082	5814	13276	11288	11625	6667
▶ Ans 300 secs	16092	12479	13467	13470	18145	19878	20694	18719
<i>% of calls answered in 15 seconds</i>	31.19%	15.77%	19.66%	32.34%	67.69%	54.40%	53.41%	30.42%
<i>% of calls answered in 5 minutes</i>	69.70%	62.14%	64.89%	74.94%	92.53%	95.81%	95.10%	85.41%
▶ Average time to answer (secs)	137	181	164	124	38	61	64	144
▶ ACW (After Call Work) (secs)	146	161	186	192	133	134	131	266
▶ Average call duration (secs)	339	375	378	364	343	319	316	255

3.32 Summary of Council tax and Business Rates collection

Table 11 below shows Council Tax collection as at 30 November 2005. This is currently 0.32 % ahead of the monthly profile target and 0.48% ahead compared to the same time last year. This is an encouraging performance but will need to be sustained throughout the post Christmas months, in order to ensure that the annual target of 93.5 % is achieved.

3.33 Table 12 below shows Business Rates collection as at 30 November 2005. This is currently 2.99% ahead of the profiled monthly target and 1.45% ahead of last year compared with the same month in 2004. This is a very encouraging performance.

Council Tax Collection performance ; Table 11

% Collection Cumulative

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
2003/2004 Actual	23.35	29.02	34.84	40.47	46.53	52.98	60.14	66.54	72.98	79.54	85.39	90.97
2004/2005 Actual	13.77	22.01	29.90	37.42	44.79	52.66	60.15	67.59	74.92	81.53	87.30	93.41
Month on month %		8.24	7.89	7.52	7.37	7.87	7.49	7.44	7.33	6.61	5.77	6.11
2005/2006 Target	13.50	21.50	29.25	37.00	44.50	52.25	60.00	67.75	75.25	82.75	88.25	93.50
Month on month %		8.00	7.75	7.75	7.50	7.75	7.75	7.75	7.50	7.50	5.50	5.25
2005/2006 Actual	14.11	22.60	30.51	37.70	45.21	52.91	60.44	68.07	75.46			
Variance on last year	0.34	0.59	0.61	0.28	0.42	0.25	0.29	0.48	0.54			
Variance on target	0.61	1.10	1.26	0.70	0.71	0.66	0.44	0.32	0.21			
Month on month %		8.49	7.91	7.19	7.51	7.70	7.53	7.63	7.39			

NNDR COLLECTION PROFILE 2005/06 : Table 12

% Collection Cumulative

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
2001/2002	7.36	16.32	24.73	34.99	43.87	55.19	65.46	73.38	81.44	90.27	91.20	96.08
2002/2003	9.36	19.50	29.19	38.55	46.81	55.51	65.56	74.23	83.50	92.01	94.33	94.75
2003/2004	N/A	17.73	26.28	37.47	46.48	56.75	65.79	73.96	84.03	92.58	94.98	96.39
2004/05	9.66	19.01	28.46	38.33	48.85	58.59	68.03	77.54	87.36	95.35	96.67	97.8
2005/2006 Target	9.25	18.50	28.00	37.50	47.50	57.00	66.50	76.00	85.50	93.50	95.00	96.40
Actual	10.57	19.75	28.99	40.08	49.61	59.56	68.94	78.99				
Variance on last year	0.91	0.74	0.53	1.75	0.76	0.97	0.91	1.45				
Variance on target	1.32	1.25	0.99	2.58	2.11	2.56	2.44	2.99				
Month on month %		9.18	9.24	11.09	9.53	9.95	9.38	10.05				

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 Any failure to maximise collection of Council Tax and NNDR will impact on the Council's cash flow and budgetary provision for future years.
- 4.2 The Benefits Service have an agreed LPSA target with the ODPM, which required us to reduce new applications processing times to 36 days by the 31 March 2006. If this target is not achieved, then the Council will not qualify for the related reward grant, which is £600K.
- 4.3 Payments of benefits amount to approximately £140 M per annum. The Council receives 100% subsidy in relation to most payments but reduced subsidy in relation to any overpaid amounts. Recovery of overpaid benefits is therefore key to meeting the cost of benefit payments to the Council.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct diversity implications arising from this report.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report.

Background Papers

Contact Officers

Margaret Read - Head of Revenues and Benefits

David Oates – Head of Benefits

Paula Buckley - Head of Client

Appendix A

Viewstar

The new Viewstar system V360 went live on 14th November 2005 and has now been in operation for 6 weeks. This phase of implementation covered all major areas of functionality specified as part of the project, as well as the conversion of all data and images to the new system.

There are 2 further implementation phases of this project planned, forming part of the overall project. The next phase involves any outstanding areas of base functionality for the software. This phase is due to be implemented in January 2006, following a final review of phase 1 implementation. The final phase of the project, is projected to be implemented later in 2006 and involves enhancements to functionality, such as integration with SX3 and web servers and automation of some processes. Contractual discussions surrounding phase 3 are now being negotiated with Capita and Global 360. The costing of this final phase will identify how the remaining project budget can be best utilised. There may be a need to prioritise requirements and if so this will be done on the basis of overall service priorities, in particular enhancements supporting operational targets such as achieving a CPA score of 4 and implementation of the VF new applications module but also our need to achieve efficiencies and ultimately reduced costs for service delivery.

The conversion to the new View 360 system was very successful and was achieved with minimal operational disruption. Users have quickly become accustomed to both the new system and new ways of working. Staff and managers are however still developing their understanding of the structure and rules driving the new system, and this has caused some confusion, particularly in terms of the interpretation of management reports. Issues are however being proactively clarified and we are now in a better position to identify areas of functionality that may need to be changed. We have identified a need to change priorities for the automatic allocation of work. However in the interim, we are able to manually override the automatic allocation of work, in order to ensure that our service priorities are addressed first.

Summary of the main changes

There are a range of benefits that have been achieved through the new system, these can be summarised as follows:

- ✓ View 360 is written in Visual Basic programming language – which is a more modern and widely used than the previous programming language (LISP). This provides much greater flexibility to make changes to the system as our service requirements and priorities change. This is particularly important for benefits where the service is subject to frequent change.

- ✓ Archived records have been moved to magnetic storage system (MSS) which has significantly improved the speed with which archived records can be accessed.
- ✓ The View 360 package uses .net technology, which means that for the first time all One Stop Shop staff can access the system from their desktops. Previously, the Viewstar system was only available on one stand alone PC in each shops, because of numerous drive mapping requirements, which could not be facilitated on individual PCs. This should significantly increase the ability of all One Stop Shop staff to deal with Revenue and Benefits queries and for reception staff to resolve quick queries, without the need for the customer to wait to see a customer services officer. This is particularly important in the Brent House One Stop Shop, which now has a large 5 staff reception designed to be able to see 5 customers concurrently. Up until 14th November, the One Stop Shop staff manning this reception only had access to one PC to view documents on Viewstar, which significantly reduced their ability to resolve queries and to reduced waiting times.
- ✓ The structure of the new system is such that all work folders contain only one main item of work and any associated supporting documents. This means that there is far greater visibility of the number of work items outstanding and hence our ability to develop our own resource planning capabilities. Additionally, all work outstanding for a customer is visible to the assessor, whenever a work folder is opened. So for example, if an assessor opens up a new application folder to process it, they will also see details of all other work items outstanding for that customer. We have instructed staff to deal with all folders relating to customers, to facilitate a more customer focussed approach to assessing but also to optimise the use of assessment officers' time (it is more efficient for one officer to familiarise themselves with a customer's claim and deal with all work items than to have several officers each individually familiarising themselves and dealing with only individual items).
- ✓ Management reports available from the new system provide far greater viability of the status and age of all work items.
- ✓ The new system provides a more robust approach to process control- as assessors are now guided through processes through "to do lists" on the system – which require them to confirm that they have carried out specified steps of the process before moving to the next. In addition to this, the new system automatically selects 10% of all work processed and refers this to managers for quality checking purposes.

Process Review

A separate process review project commenced in September 05, with the help of DWP funding. The development of V360 and in particular phase 3 of implementation will now become an integral part of the process review brief. A review of Change in Circumstances processes identified a range of potential recommendations for the development of View 360, that will help to improve efficiencies of processing for these. Work is now underway on a new applications review and this will provide a base position for identifying the necessary changes required to achieve full VF compliance in 2006/07. Again this will inform future developments of View 360. It is intended to review all key processes by March 2006, if possible.