

Appendix C

Performance and Finance Sub Committee Local Government Ombudsman reports on two complaints about the Revenue and Benefits Service

Draft Revenue and Benefits Vulnerable Customers policy

Foreword and aims

The Revenue and Benefits service is responsible for collecting Council tax from 104,000 households living in Brent and administering financial help with Council tax and rent payments to some of the most vulnerable members of the Brent Community (there are currently 33,000 people in receipt of Housing/Council Tax Benefit).

We recognise that although there are pockets of affluence within Brent, on the whole there are large areas of deprivation and poverty. Brent is the 81st most deprived borough in England and Wales. We also recognise that with a majority Black Minority Ethnic population and a richly diverse community, we need to ensure that the design and delivery of the Revenue and Benefits service reflects the needs of this diverse community and make provision to meet their needs wherever this is possible.

We equally recognise that income from Council Tax and Business Rates, represents a significant proportion of the Council's overall revenue requirements and that we have a responsibility and a need to maximise the collection of these taxes, in order to facilitate the Council's ability to provide services to those living and working in Brent.. We aim to carry out these responsibilities responsibly and sensitively, recognising the differing needs and circumstances of our customers.

We acknowledge that the effective administration of Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefit plays a vital part in preventing homelessness and severe financial hardship to some of the most vulnerable members of the Brent Community. . We aim to ensure that those who are entitled to these benefits are aware and able to easily access financial help through these schemes and receive prompt and accurate assessment of their claim. We also recognise our duty to protect public funds and to ensure that we prevent fraud and error entering the system , so that only those who are genuinely entitled receive help.

This strategy sets out the policies that will support these overall aims and our commitment to identifying our most potentially vulnerable customers and delivering the Revenue and Benefits service in ways that best meet their needs. We believe we can best achieve this by