

TO: **EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE – 21 SEPTEMBER 2004**

SUBJECT: **THE BENEFITS SERVICE AND THE VERIFICATION FRAMEWORK**

FROM: **CUSTOMER INFORMATION AND ADVICE DIRECTORATE**

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1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To request Member approval of the additions to the Benefits and Revenues Service staff structure as detailed in section 2 of the report.

2. **BACKGROUND**

2.1 In June 2002, the Executive endorsed the principles of the Government's Verification Framework (VF) for the combating of fraud and error in the benefits system. The Executive agreed that the Benefits Service should "sign-up" to Module one (which concerned new claims for benefit) of the Framework and a revised staffing structure was agreed.

2.11 Following the successful introduction of Module one, in May 2003 the Executive agreed to adopt Module two of the Framework which dealt with customers re-applying for Benefit. The adoption of this module was taken on board without any further revision to the staffing structure.

2.12 The final part of the VF is known as the Visits Module. The purpose behind this final module is to visit benefit recipients at home, once their claim is up and running, to check that they have had no changes to their circumstances since they last made their claim.

Funding the Visits Module

2.2 Government recognizes that local authorities require financial support to comply with the requirements of the VF. The authority currently receives £69,039 each year to help finance the running costs associated with the VF. Notification of how much the authority will receive for the next financial year is ordinarily notified in the preceding December.

2.21 For the whole of the financial year 2004/2005 the authority would have received £46,026 in ongoing funding. The Benefits Service is aiming to comply with the requirements of the Visits Module by 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2005. Therefore one quarter of the ongoing funding would be received i.e. £11,506.

2.22 For 2005/2006 and subsequent years it is envisaged that funding will be at a similar level to that of 2004/2005. However, long term planning is made difficult as the funding is only confirmed year to year. Whilst there is no indication that funding will be ended, the Government having funded the Framework since 1998, this process does influence the type of contracts that can be offered to potential staff.

- 2.23 As well as receiving ongoing funding, the authority also receives “set-up” funding. Upon signing-up to the module, Warwick will receive £11,536. This funding will be used to purchase necessary equipment such as phones, personal safety alarms, PC’s, protective clothing and such like as well as paying for essential training.

Administering the Visits Module

- 2.3 A condition of receiving the Government’s funding is that authorities undertake a set number of visits each year. Warwick will be required to undertake 1520.
- 2.31 To meet this requirement, it is proposed that the Benefits Service recruits two visiting officers at Grade G. The Job Evaluation panel is to consider the job description for the proposed posts on 28 September, however, a welfare visiting officer currently on the Benefits staffing structure is graded at G.
- 2.32 Due to the way the funding is received, it is proposed that the positions are advertised as two year temporary contracts.

2.33 **Revenue Expenditure in 2004/2005**

Two Grade G officers (including on costs)	= £9,525
Travel costs (including Essential Car User Allowance)	= £1,750
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	£11,275

**2004/2005 Finance**

Central Government ongoing funding	= £11,506
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2.34 **Revenue Expenditure in 2005/2006**

Two Grade G officers (including on costs)	= £39,200
Travel costs (including Essential Car User Allowance)	= £7,000
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	£46,200

**2005/2006 Finance**

Central Government ongoing funding	= £46,026
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**3 POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK**

- 3.1 Members have endorsed the principles of the VF and determined one of the key corporate objectives as targeting resources at the areas of greatest need. Complying with all aspects of VF sends a clear message that the authority will not tolerate abuse of the benefit scheme and will do all it can to stop it. At the same time as preventing fraud, adoption of the visits module allows officers to check that benefit recipients are receiving all the help they are entitled too.
- 3.2 Government is providing funding to administer the scheme so there is no cost to the authority.

**4 RECOMMENDATION**

4.1 Members approve the proposals detailed in Section 2 of the report.

**Andrew Jones**  
**Head of Benefits and Revenues**

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL

<b>Areas in District Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Included in Forward Plan:</b>	No

**For further information about this report please contact:**

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