

Cabinet – 18 June 2008

Welfare Rights Joint Team

Portfolio:	Councillor Al Griffiths, Finance and personnel
Service:	Revenues & Benefits Welfare Rights Service
Wards:	All
Key decision:	Yes
Forward plan:	Yes

1. Summary of report

To inform the Members of the Joint Team progress between the Council's Welfare Rights Service and the Department of Works and Pensions Local Service from 01/04/06 – 31/03/08.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Cabinet consider its approval for the Joint Team's project to continue and to be formalised as an established team between the two Organisations.

3. Background information

- 3.1 The Joint Team was developed with Walsall Council's Welfare Rights Service (WRS) and Department of Works and Pensions Local Service (DWP) after a successful initiative involving the two organisations to target potential Pension Credit claimants across the Borough.
- 3.2 A Joint Team was set up to have dedicated team of workers for those residents who were aged 80 years and over giving this vulnerable age group the confidence in dealing with a single officer who completes all financial assessments, welfare benefit claim forms together with additional complimentary services that are also essential to their wellbeing.
- 3.3 The initiative shows that the joint working project has been very successful for the over 80's age group living in the Borough. There have been 4369 home visits made leading to 2476 new or additional awards of welfare benefit claims (appendix d) as a direct result of the work undertaken together with 2393 complimentary service applications being made like Blue Badges and aids and adaptation grant forms.

- 3.4 The project has seen over £5.226, 806 million paid out as a result of the home visiting over the last two financial years, with each attracting an average additional yearly welfare benefit income of £1784.52 as well as one off lump sum payments averaging £326.13
- 3.5 The Team is made up of three officers from the Welfare Rights Service, two DWP Executive Officers plus a full time admin assistant together with two full time visiting officers from Revenues and Benefits.
- 3.6 The Team received extensive training developing their skills enabling them to deliver a holistic service across both Organisations.
- 3.7 The approach has shown us clients are very happy with the service which is portrayed through our customer service questionnaire. Appendix a.
- 3.8 The team has developed new skills and adopted new procedures to ensure a quality service is being delivered to all their clients.
- 3.9 The success of the Team can be demonstrated with 2257 referrals being made in the first year of which 2248 visited at home were classed as effective to gain collectively £1,816,984 in welfare benefits as well as £327,217 in one off lump sum payments gained in the first year of operation to the 31st March 2007. Appendix b & c
- 3.10 The Team has continued to be successful in its second year despite staff numbers from the DWP being reduced during the summer. The team has made 2121 effective visits to gain collectively £2,601,508 in welfare benefits as well as £481,097 in one off lump sum payments between the 1st April and 31st March 2008. Appendix b & c
- 3.11 The previous Pension Credit piloted schemes approach was that it concentrated solely on the over 60's on the start up of the Governments Pension Credit scheme and this realised over £500,000 within a short time scale.
- 3.12 The success of this Joint Team initiative is that the officer considers all eligible benefit forms and completes them so that the residents receive an enhanced holistic approach. This demonstrates the success of the Joint Team where they have gained over £4.418 million from multiple benefit applications in addition to lump sum payments of £808,314. Appendix c & d
- 3.13 The Joint Team reports directly to the Manager of the Welfare Rights Service for all operational needs with support from DWP Local Service. The team is located at Dartmouth House with DWP computer systems installed at this location.

4. Resource considerations

4.1 Financial:

Staffing costs are already met by both organisations and there are no additional financial costs.

4.2 Legal:

A Service Level Agreement exists between the two Organisations at the moment and dictates a three month notice period to be given if the agreement is to end.

The Strategic Management Board is a legally constituted body that has senior representatives from the Local Authority and The Department of Works and Pensions who meet on a quarterly basis to discuss performance and operational issues and makes decisions appropriately.

4.3 Staffing:

The Team will consist of staff from both Organisations who are already accounted for within both Organisational budgets.

5. Citizen impact

- 5.1 Residents previously received multiple visits from a range of agencies, the Team has minimised the visits from different officers and multiple agencies with all official forms which need completion on behalf of the customer quickly and efficiently; therefore reducing stress on the client.
- 5.2 The methodology adopted by the Team is to visit all residents in their own homes to put them at ease, treat them with respect and consideration and to allow the officers to carry out a full welfare benefit maximisation, this then eliminates the pressure of the elderly and vulnerable customer from having to visit the first stop shop and other agencies venues with the same information.
- 5.3 This vulnerable group genuinely do not know what they are entitled to claim, they get confused by long and complicated forms. The claim process is explained to the client and their family or representative. The Team then help to complete the forms whilst showing empathy and understanding towards all people they come into contact with which enables trust and confidence to be built up between the client and multiple agencies.
- 5.4 The Team make a substantial difference to the quality of life of all people they come into contact with. For example, a single pensioner in some instances can see their weekly income increase by well over £100.00 per week made up of multiple claims for different benefits. The average weekly award per benefit claimed is £34.32. These additional benefits allow them to pay for any help they need: for example to be able to buy healthier quality food and importantly have the central heating on when they need it and not when they feel they can afford it.

6. Community safety

- 6.1 Referrals are made for crime prevention and through our complimentary service we can also refer to Adult Services for the full range of their service such as home care.

7. Environmental impact

- 7.1 Less travelling by multiple agencies
- 7.2 Energy efficiency measures had positive impact on the environment through our complimentary services such as low energy light bulbs, referrals for home insulation schemes and central heating systems.

8. Performance and risk management issues

8.1 Risk:

There are no risks in adopting the report for the continuation of the joint team.

8.2 Performance management:

Performance will continue to improve as unnecessary visits, duplication of information and time wasted has been cut out.

Were the report to be rejected then we would go back to the status quo and the impact on the customer / service user will be increased as is evident by the customer survey. (Appendix a)

9. Equality implications

The team have covered the whole area of Walsall and serve all communities based on need irrespective of race, colour, creed, gender and disability. The team recognises diversity and is representative of the community it serves. We regularly look at statistics by ethnicity and area to ensure full take up. We have also made measurable consistent improvement throughout the project to achieve our goals.

10. Consultation

The Fairer Charging project board implementation group have been consulted on the joint team project as we also complete fairer charging assessments for home care, day care, direct payments and supporting people.

The project board included all areas of the Social Services Adults team and all the Voluntary Sector services within Walsall.

The Walsall FAB team questionnaire summary was used as a consultation exercise to seek the views of customers. Appendix a

Background papers

- Walsall FAB Team Questionnaire Survey Summary (Appendix a)
- Performance 2006 – 2007 Visits (Appendix b)
- Performance 2007 - 2008 Gains (Appendix c)
- Performance 2006 – 2008 Claims (Appendix d)
- Deaths by Age Range (Appendix e)

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James Walsh
Chief Finance Officer

9 June 2008



Councillor Albert Griffiths
Portfolio Holder Finance and Resources

9 June 2008



Walsall FAB Team Questionnaire Summary

Narrative

All customers visited during w/c 3rd & 11th July plus a selection of customers visited during w/c 26th June were issued with a customer questionnaire, 80 in total. Where records show that a customer has an appointee then the questionnaire was issued to this person. They were given 2 weeks to respond, in view of the age of the client group it was decided no follow up action would be taken if no response was received.

The visits covered the full range of referrals including Fairer Charging, HB Reviews, Pension Centre & Welfare Rights.

A total of 45 replies were received (52.5%) however not all customers answered all questions therefore any percentages were calculated on the number of answers obtained. A full breakdown of responses is attached.

The responses are very pleasing with some excellent results and some worthwhile comments about the team as a whole and individual members.

The next stage is to issue questionnaires to team members and stakeholders. These will then be collated and form part of the Evaluation report

Trudy Rollinson
1st September 2006



FAB Team Questionnaire

A total of 80 questionnaires issued, 45 returned (52.5%)

1. Did you feel the time between making the arrangements to see you and the actual meeting was a reasonable time to wait?

Yes	45	Comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Also had opportunity to change as the original arrangement did not suit Visit was a few days of applying, which I consider very good Much quicker than I expected
No	Nil	
%	100%	

2. Did the Visiting Officer display their identification when introducing themselves?

Yes	44	Comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediately on arrival Most concerned that I saw ID
No	Nil	
No Answer	1	
%	100%	

3. Did the Visiting Officer give you a full explanation as to why he/she had called?

Yes	43	Comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I understood completely With professionalism & politeness Very kind & considerate, a pleasure to talk too
No	0	
No answer	2	
%	100%	

4. Did the Visiting Officer give you a full explanation of why we needed to see your personal documents?

Yes	44	Comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was quite happy with explanation • It was necessary to find out if we were due anymore entitlement • A card from the Queen
No	1	
No Answer	Nil	
%	97.77%	

5. Was the Visiting Officer polite and courteous?

Yes	40	Comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasant, Polite, Patient x 7 • Most polite person I have ever known • Extremely & made the visit very friendly • Displayed courtesy & understanding
No	Nil	
No Answer	5	
%	100%	

6. Was the visiting officer able to provide you with information about additional services ? e.g. Fire Safety checks

Yes	28	Comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire safety & datalink
No	5	
Not required	6	
No Answer	6	
%	71.79%	

7. Were you able to claim any additional or increase in your benefits?
If NO go to question 12

Yes	15	<p>Comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am very happy to receive more money • Amount was minimal so I did not proceed but door was left open to pursue at a later date if we wish
No	19	
Don't know	1	
No Answer	10	
%	42.85%	

- 8 Has the additional money changed or improved your standard of living?

- Yes definitely (x 6)
- Extra help in garden
- Get more food and some jobs done
- Helped tremendously as I was upset & worried about being able to pay bills
- Taxis
- More fresh fruit & meat
- Helped pay bills & home help

8. What kind of things can you afford now that you would have avoided or worried about previously?

- Clothing, shoes, food & bills
- Heating, electric, transport for shopping
- Items of food which were impossible before
- Better diet
- No worries about keeping warm in winter & buying clothes
- Help in the home
- Garden & household repairs (x 6)

10. Did you realise you were under-claiming benefits?

Yes	1	Comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talked through our entitlement, some of which we didn't understand
No	15	
No Answer	29	

11. If YES had you sought advice previously and if so from which organisation?

Yes	1	Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age Concern
No	3	
No Answer	41	

12. Please rate your view of overall quality of the service?

Poor	Nil	Comments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member of FAB Team who carried out Fairer Charging financial assessment was professional, understanding, informative & extremely co-operative Everything explained, Great Service !
Average	2	
Good	11	
Very Good	16	
Excellent	15	
No Answer	1	
%	95.45%	Answered Good – Very Good -Excellent

13. Would you recommend the service to others?

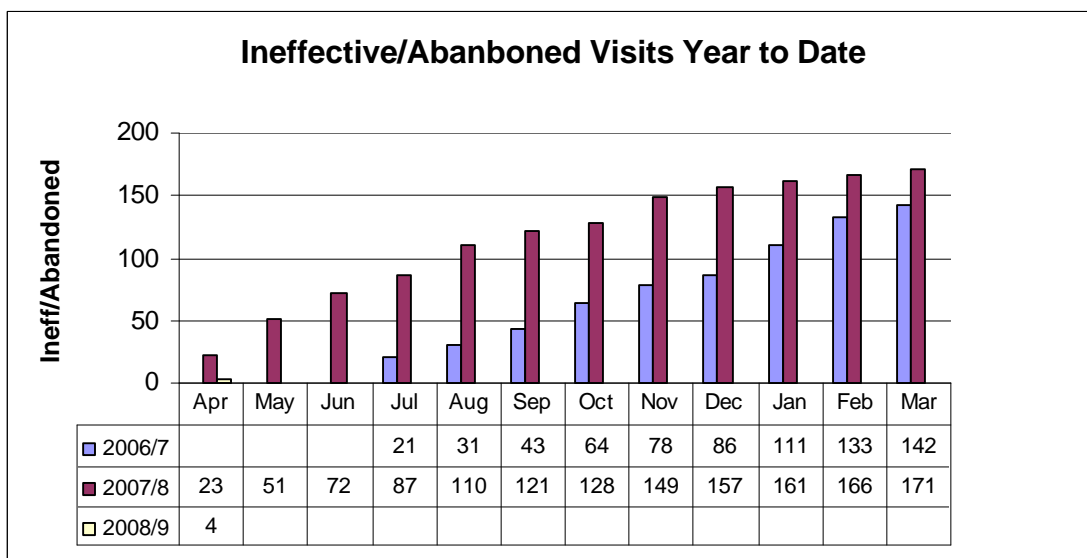
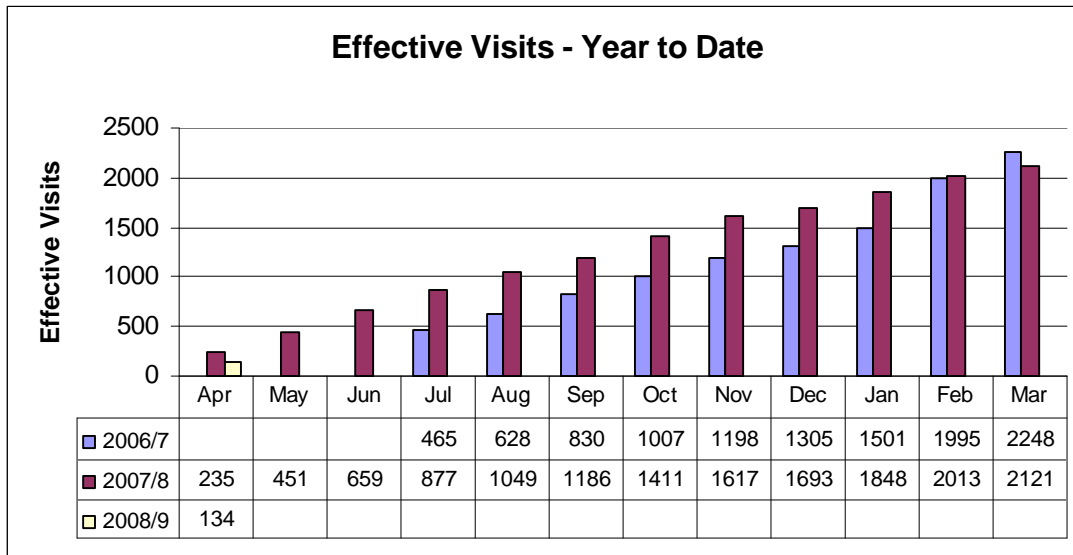
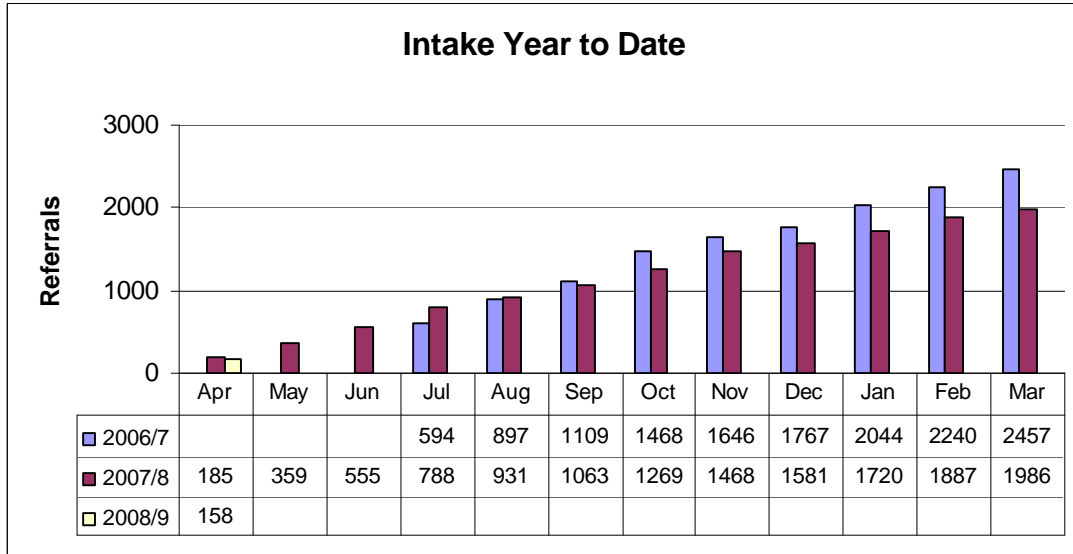
Yes	42	Comment <ul style="list-style-type: none">• conducted with professionalism & kindness, didn't seem as though she was prying• if they required any information• many of us do not know what we should be getting so it's a great service
No	Nil	
No Answer	3	
%	100%	

Any additional comments

- Thank You all for the time taken & excellent service. A special thank you to the lady who came to my home and made things so easy to understand
- Hope the FAB Team will be helpful in future should necessity arise
- Thank you for your help following the death of my husband, most appreciated
- Your staff are very nice to talk too & to do business with them was a pleasure
- So understanding & really made things easy, don't know what I would have done without her
- Visiting officer very efficient, we were very impressed with her
- Couldn't have had a better service
- Good advice, good service
- After the death of my husband, sorted out a funeral grant that was very helpful
- Subsequent dealings by phone have been helpful & informative "Well done"
- The woman was very pleasant kind and patient

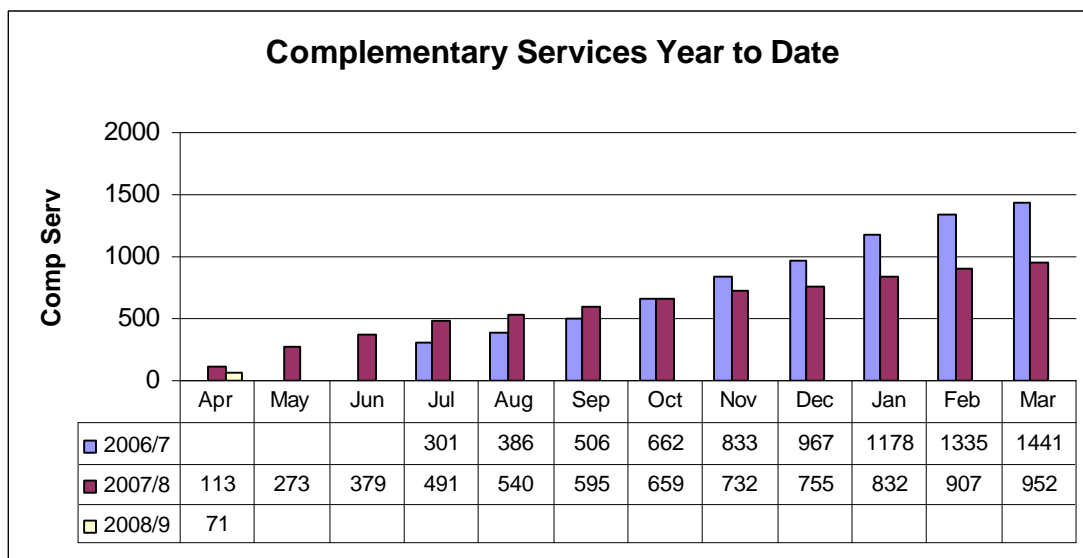
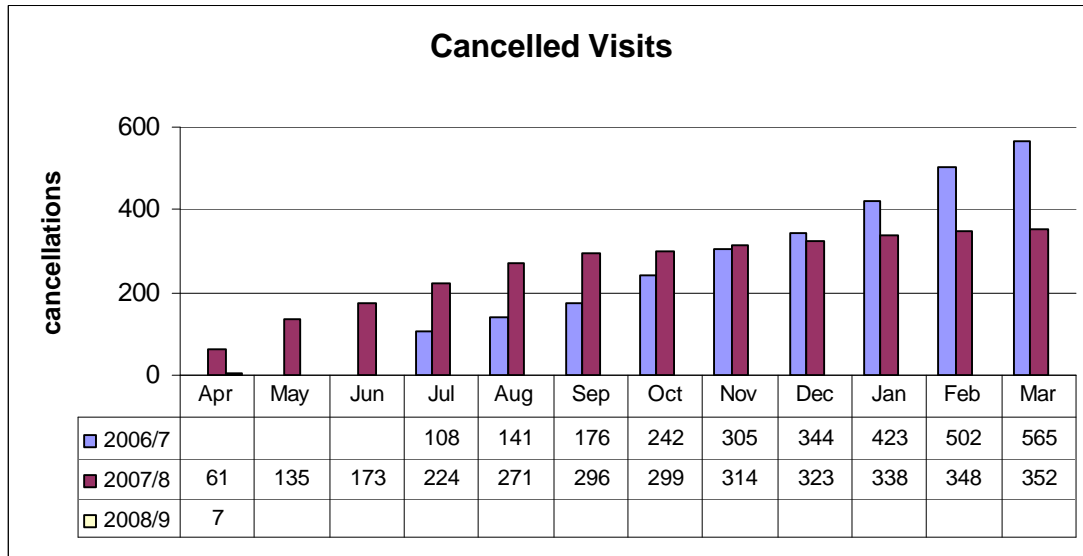
Joint Team Performance 2006 – 2008

Appendix b



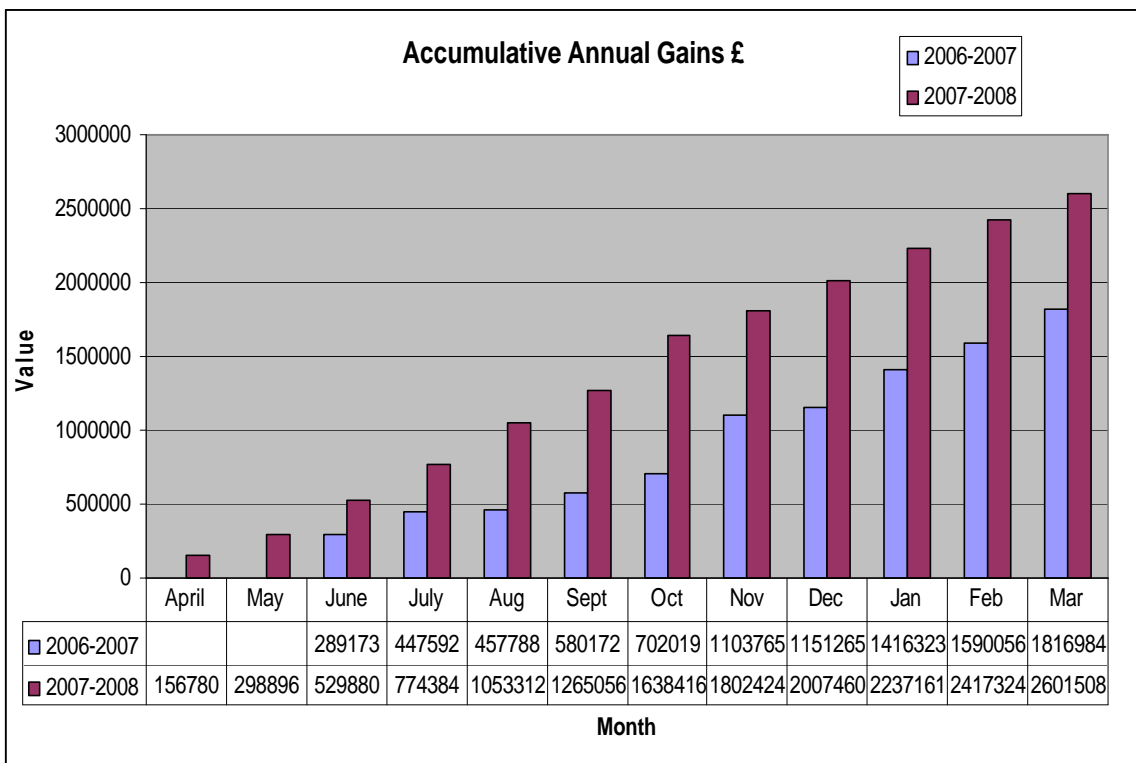
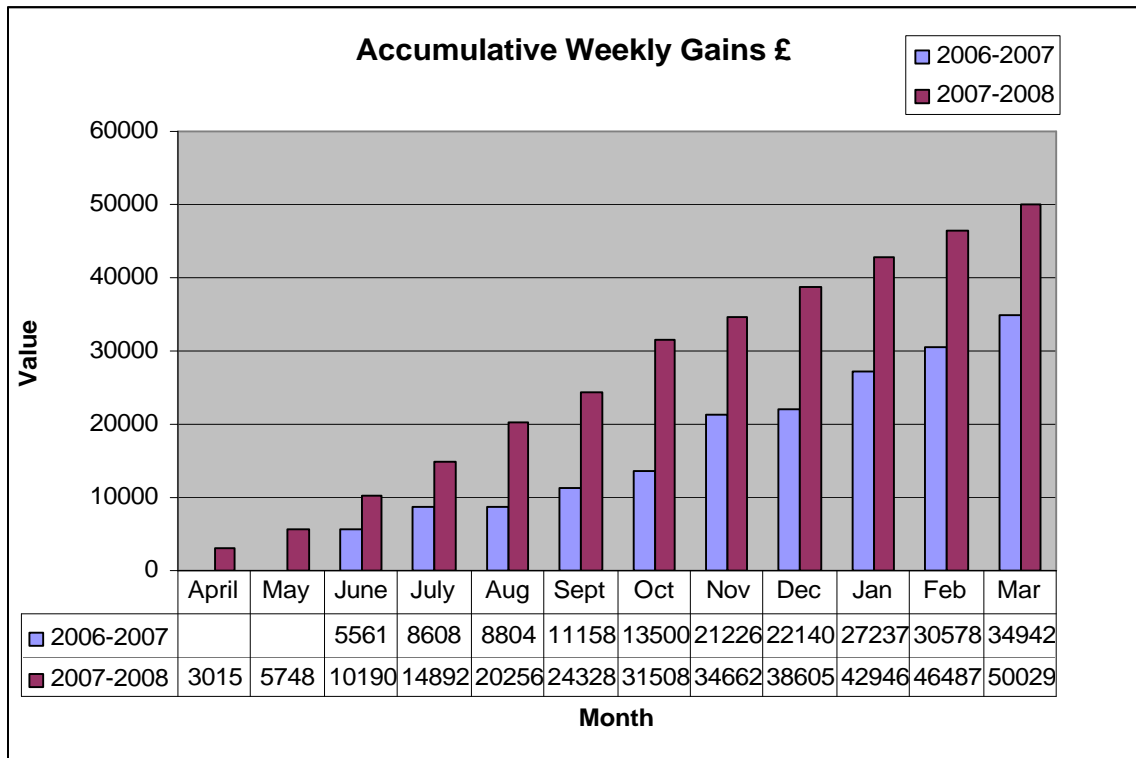
Joint Team Performance 2006 – 2008

Appendix b



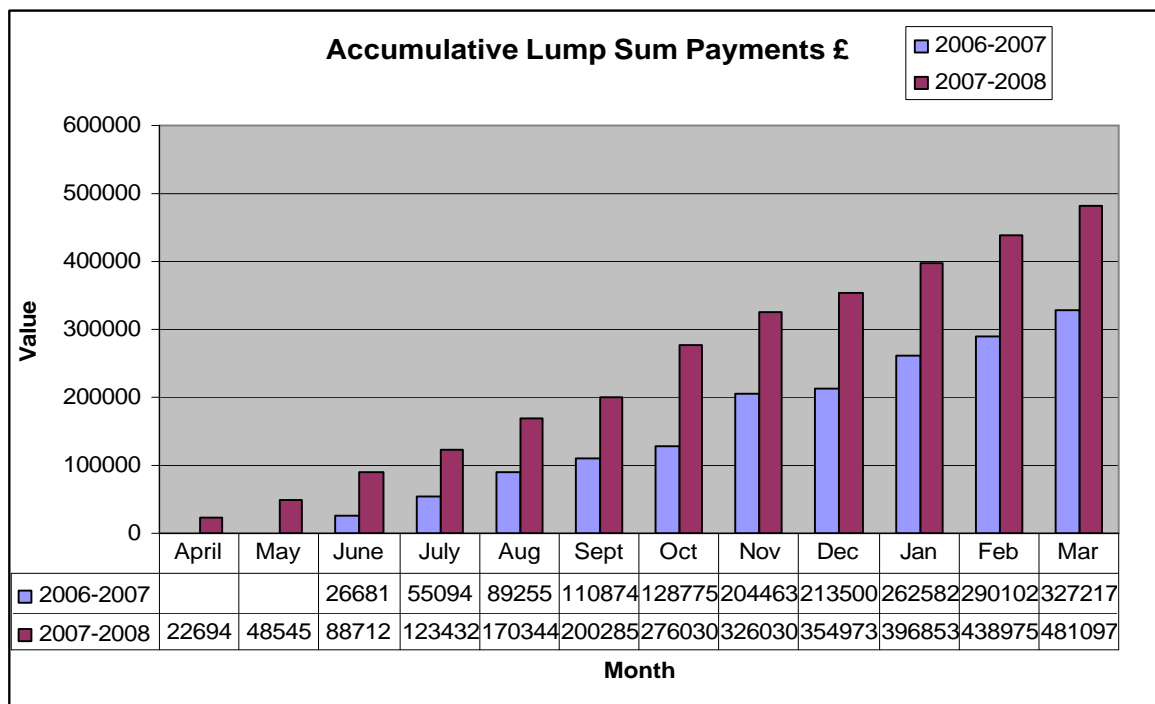
Accumulative Gains 2006-2008

(Appendix c)



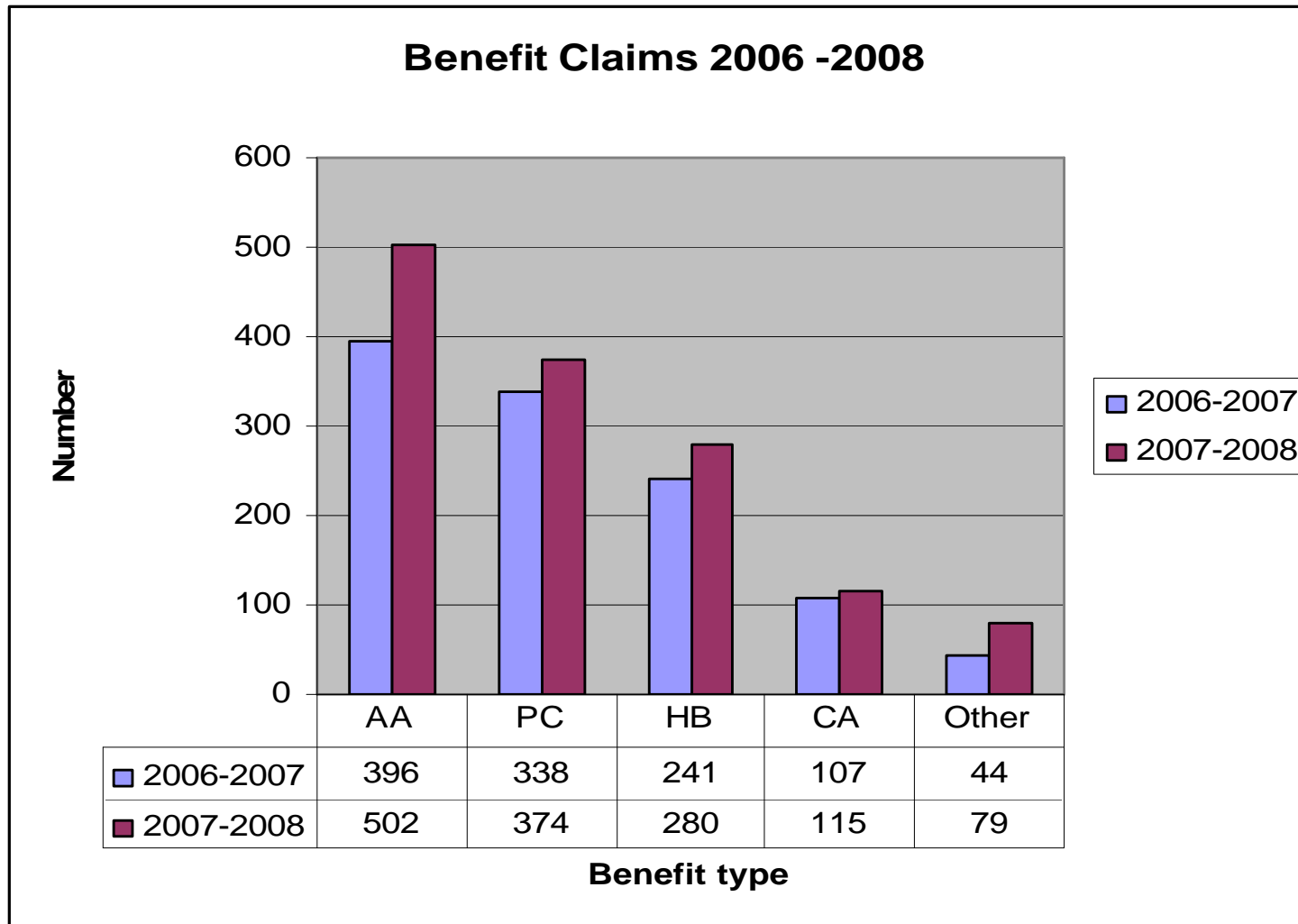
Accumulative Gains 2006-2008

(Appendix c)



Performance 2006 – 2008 Benefit Claims

(Appendix d)



Deaths by Age Range and Sex 60+

Appendix e

