

# BRENT BOROUGH COUNCIL



## HOUSING BENEFITS Recommendations

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# 1. Indexing

The “Indexing” application offers a full static list of all Document Types. This list does not change when the indexer selects/sets a “Worktype” for the folder.

*Suggest that the “Indexing” application be modified such that on selection of a folder “Worktype” the list of Document types is refreshed to display a list containing only those Document types that are relevant. In some cases there is one document type only for a selected “Worktype”, e.g. “Worktype” Complaint has only one Document Type that is “Complaint”. In such cases the Document type selection should be automatic, thus avoiding or at least minimising indexing errors as well as speeding up the indexing operation.*

## 2. Workbench

The following recommendations have resulted from discussions with officers that use the ViewStar Workbench application, as well as from my past experience with similar systems.

### 2.1 Active and Done folders

The “Find” window offers a list of folders that have a “Workflow Status” of either “Active” or “Done”. “Active” folders are the type of folders that officers using Workbench are mostly interested in. Folders that are “Done” are those folders that have been either completed (processed and sent to “Archive”), or those that have matched and merged with other folders.

*Suggest that by default the “Find” functionality be changed to display only “Active” folders. There may be occasions when officers need to search for folders that are “Done”. To enable such functionality I suggest to add a new menu option (under “Special”). This will provide the capability of setting “Find” to display either or, or both “Active” and “Done” folders, as needed.*

### 2.2 Sorting outstanding work

I have already enhanced the “Find” functionality to display list of folders in ascending “Priority” order that is the highest priority (lowest number) is on top of the list. However, officers may prefer to order this list by “Target Date” such that folders that have been due for the longest time appear on top of the list.

*Suggest that the “Workbench” application offers officers the option of ordering folders listed in “Find” by either “Priority” or “Target Date”. The default is yet to be decided.*

## 2.3 Listing multiple Worktypes

Following from Phase I modifications the “Find” window in Workbench is capable of listing folders of a preselected “Worktype”. Selection of folders of a list of “Worktypes” (multiple Worktypes) may be needed for various reasons, i.e. work allocation.

*Suggest that a new “Special” menu option is added to the “Workbench” application, to allow selection of multiple Worktypes to use with “Find”.*

## 3. Work Allocation

### 3.1 Overview

The ViewStar product comprises a “Security” module that is capable of implementing the concept of profiles, groups within profiles and users within groups, thereby providing controlled access to desktop applications. Upon invoking the “Workbench” application users are offered a default input (*Team*) Queue that matches their group name, currently one of “North”, “South”, “East” or “CTax”. Unless otherwise customised (programmed), all users that are provided access to a ViewStar application have equal privileges regarding access to that particular application’s functionality.

ViewStar Queues have been configured to route work to teams of officers. Within each Queue further segregation is possible based on the contents of any of the work attributes that is stored in the Queues. For example, referral of a folder to a user is simply performed by setting the team and the user on the appropriate columns in the folder’s record, in the Queue. In a similar way work allocation to individuals may be derived based on the contents of any of the Queues’ columns. For example, each officer may be assigned a predefined range of UPRNs or CTAX numbers or Postal Codes, etc.

### 3.2 Officers “Accountability”

The current Team-based work allocation provides adequate input to the MIR Management Information and Reporting system. However, work is currently allocated to teams rather than to individual officers, thus monitoring personal accountability becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible. In a typical scenario an officer opens a folder, inspects it and decides that the case may be “too complicated”. The officer has the option of sending the opened folder to the Diary Queue, thereby keeping away from immediate involvement. Upon maturity, the folder is automatically returned from the Diary to the workflow. This time the folder becomes anyone’s issue to resolve and it may be unpredictable who would be the next officer to open and deal with it. There is nothing that avoids other officers from repeating this same sequence, while managers remain unaware of potential problems that may otherwise require immediate intervention in order to avoid delays in processing.

### **3.3 Current ViewStar Work Allocation**

Currently, distribution of Housing Benefits folders to the “North”, “South”, “East” teams is dictated by data that is extracted from SX3. A search is run on tables V\_IDXBRUPR\_BRHBIS and V\_IDXBRUPR\_BRCTAX. The indexer enters a search criteria that is SURNAME and/or UPRN and/or HBIS and/or CTAX Number. As a result of the “Search” performed by the Indexing officer a “HITS” table is created. This table contains not only the full persons details (Surname, First Name, Address, Postal Code, etc) but also the allocated team for that folder, that is “North”, “South” or “East”. I have not had the chance to investigate how SX3 decides on this allocation and this was not within the scope of my assignment.

### **3.4 Native versus Discretionary Work Allocation**

Currently the work allocation that has for a while operated at Brent is somewhat unusual. Effectively it is “allocation by exception” or rather “allocation by discretion”. Team leaders create lists of folders by ViewStar REQIDs, on a twice-daily basis. This is a task that is entirely dependant upon the team leader’s presence is tedious and time consuming. Rather than processing work using the “Next” method, officers are limited to using the “Find” method, to search/select and open folders by REQID, from the ViewStar Tracking (Locate) window. While this processing style is slow it also renders monitoring of individual’s progress through management reports unnecessarily complicated.

If native work allocation were adopted, officers would be able to process folders using either the “Find” or the “Next” method, simply opening the next folder according to auto-allocation and in a personal order of preference, by Priority or Target Date. Native work distribution is automatic, that is it does not require team leader’s presence or intervention; and it offers the potential of delivering intuitive progress monitoring, by officers and managers.

If work allocation by UPRNs range is adopted this would be set and controlled by the System Administrators at the directions of business management.

## **4. Management Reporting**

It is a known fact that business needs change frequently, thus it is extremely important that as new business rules are adopted, different reports become available. In addition the late addition of the Council Tax Queue, which is not known to the existing MIR system, there is an urgent need to replace this tool with a new. Managers, with the assistance of a System Administrator should be able to quickly add, remove and/or modify reports, without having to program them in any computer language or having to follow a relatively complex configuration of Excel PivotTables. In fact, some of ViewStar’s data is not always stored in database tables. Some of the ViewStar Queues are file based and are stored on the File Server, making it impossible to access and / or create reports through the use Excel PivotTables.

The following is a preliminary list of reports that management may find useful:

#### **4.1 Scanning / Indexing**

Number of folders/documents scanned per day.

Number of folders/documents indexed by an individual per day.

Number of folders/documents indexed per day (total)

Number of scanned folders awaiting indexing.

Number of folders in the Rescan Queue.

#### **4.2 Benefits / Revenue / Fraud / Liaison**

Work outstanding by Worktype per team or by an individual.

Work outstanding for every officer.

Work completed per team or by an individual.

Work sent to Diary per team or by an individual.

Work Owned by Worktype.

#### **4.3 Diary**

Work in Diary with Scan date / Diary in / Diary Out dates.

Work in Diary with number of times sent to Diary.

#### **4.4 Backlog**

Work outstanding showing number of days after Target (Due) date.

Work outstanding by Worktype, number of days overdue and owner.