

Report to: Audit, Governance and Improvement Review Committee

Date: 31st January 2008

Subject: CPA Scores - Housing Benefits Service

Report of: Director of Finance & Information Technology

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Purpose / summary: To inform members of the results of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's 2007 review of the Housing Benefits Service

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: No alternatives, for information only

Recommendation / decision: Members note the report

Key Decision: This report does not involve a key decision. The decision made as a result of this report will be published within **48 hours** and cannot be actioned until **seven working days** have elapsed, i.e. before 12th February 2008

Risks / Implications:

Financial: High quality performance contributes to effective service delivery for benefit claimants and recipients

Staffing:
Policy: The Benefits Service has a key role in the Council's anti-poverty strategy

Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted? A diversity impact assessment is not necessary at this stage, however, equality and diversity implications are considered and given high priority within wider Housing Benefit service delivery arrangements

Wards affected: All

Property Implications– Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council’s asset base or its occupation?

No

If yes have the property implications been agreed with the Corporate Property officer?

N/a

Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population?

This is a performance report rather than proposals for major service changes. However the service impacts upon a significant proportion of the population so the results are of high significance..

Does this proposal involve a new policy or procedure or significant changes to an existing policy or procedure?

No

Has the Director of Legal and Property Services confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council’s Constitution?

N/a *

Has the Director of Finance and IT confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council’s budget?

N/a*

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council?

No *

* delete which applicable

For Cabinet reports only :

Categorisation of the report:	X
Discussion leading to a decision	
Monitoring	
Sharing for corporate understanding	

	X
Discussion	
Decision	
Information	

Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council

There are no Background Papers to this Report within the meaning of Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Proper Officer David Smith

Date 14th January 2008

Introduction

As part of the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment, a review is performed each year of the quality and effectiveness of the Housing Benefits Service.

The scores from this review form part of the Council's overall assessment so a low score on this area will indicate a poor service to thousands of low income households and will have an adverse impact on the Council's ability to achieve a 4-star rating.

The assessment covers 4 main themes, and by analysis of performance data for each quarterly period during the year, it enables a judgement to be formed of the performance of the service throughout the year.

Source: BFI analysis

Theme	2006	2007
Claims administration	3	3
Security	4	4
User focus	2	2
Resource management	4	4
Overall score	3	3

Details of the overall assessment are included at Appendix 1, but the summary table demonstrates that the service overall is rated as "good". The main areas for improvement relate to "User Focus" and reflect some of the problems that were being experienced in the Appeals Process. These had been recognised and active steps taken to address them (as acknowledged in the report) and some improvements are already evident.

A dedicated Telephone Team has been introduced in order to resolve enquiries at the first point of contact. This has been a great success and has released assessment staff to concentrate upon processing claims within the Department for Work and Pensions targets for both accuracy and timeliness.

Enhancement of the Quality Assurance and Training resource has played a key part in achieving our accuracy levels and has addressed the ever-changing Regulations and guidance under which we operate.

Our third main topic was to ensure that benefit appeals are dealt with as quickly as possible. Reorganisation of the work, together with enhancements to our electronic document workflow has greatly improved this area of work.

Other aspects of the assessment feature some high standards of achievement being maintained and some areas of significant improvement within the different themes, even though the overall scores remain unaltered. (details within the appendix).

Wider benchmarking figures indicate that the Wigan service is relatively low cost, so an overall score of 3, with ongoing improvements within the various elements of the assessment indicate that the service represents good value for money for the service users.

Further improvements will continue to be made where possible, to ensure benefits are delivered correctly and speedily to those who are properly entitled.

Recommendation. Members note the report

Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2007

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

Introduction

1.1 This assessment has been undertaken as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) programme and does not represent a full inspection of Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council's Benefits service. This report has been produced pursuant to powers contained in sections 10 and 11 of the Local Government Act 1999.

1.2 We gathered information for this assessment from a range of sources including:

- the self-assessment and evidence provided by the council
- Best Value Performance Indicators and performance measures
- discussions with senior officers in the council
- BFI's CPA 2006 report.

Overall Performance

1.3 In 2006 we reported that the council met 5 of the 12 performance measures and 58 of the 65 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against 6 of the 13 performance measures scored by the Department and met 61 of the 65 enablers. This resulted in the scores reflected below:

Performance Standards score	Good
Audit Commission score	3

1.4 Although the overall Claims administration performance achieved the same Good rating as 2005/06, underlying performance in 2006/07 had improved against 5 of the 6 performance measures.

1.5 The council's strong 2005/06 performance against the Security theme was sustained during 2006/07, with interventions and visiting targets again exceeded and counter-fraud performance remaining in the top quartile.

1.6 Once again, poor performance on appeals work was the major factor for the council's low User focus score and prevented the council achieving an Excellent rating overall. The council had started to address this and appeals performance during the last 6 months of 2006/07 had improved significantly.

1.7 Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council provided a full self-assessment against 2006 HB/CTB Performance Standards. The evidence provided by the council supported its self-assessment.

1.8 Figure 1.1 compares the scores for the individual Performance Standards theme scores for CPA 2006 and CPA 2007 to highlight any changes in reported performance.

Figure 1.1: Performance Standards theme scores

Theme	2006	2007	Change
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Claims administration	3	3	=
Security	4	4	=
User focus	2	2	=
Resource management	4	4	=
Overall score	3	3	=

Source: BFI analysis

Findings

Claims administration

1.9 Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council's performance measure data for Claims administration is shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Claims administration performance measures 2006/07						
Performance measure	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Full year	Score
PM 1: Average time for processing new claims (days)	43	37	28	29	34	3
PM 2: % of new claims outstanding over 50 days	20	9	12	8	8	4
PM 3: % of new claims decided within 14 days of receiving all information	74	82	91	89	84	3
PM 4: % of rent allowance claims paid on time or within 7 days of a decision being made	78	82	80	84	82	2
PM 5: Average time for processing changes of circumstances (days)	15	12	8	8	11	3
PM 6: % of cases for which the calculation of the amount of benefit due is correct	94	98	98	98	97	2

Source: Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

(Full year figures are based on an annual calculation and may not reflect the average of 4 quarters performance)

1.10 In 2006 we reported that the council met one of the 6 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against one of the 6 performance measures scored by the Department. We also reported that the council met 12 of the 16 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it met 13.

1.11 Claims processing performance improved progressively throughout 2006/07 as the council recovered from the negative impact of changes to its document management system during the final quarter of 2005/06.

1.12 During 2006/07, the council introduced arrangements to monitor the average time taken to calculate overpayments following the receipt of sufficient information. We concluded that enabler E13 was now met.

Security

1.13 In April 2006, Performance Standards were revised to include a scoring mechanism for performance measure PM16. This takes account of the number of successful sanctions applied in relation to a council's live caseload.

1.14 Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council's performance measure data for Security is shown in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3: Security Performance measure scores 2006/07			
Performance measure	Annual target	Performance	Score
PM 10: Interventions where review action completed	13,090	106.2%	4
PM 11: Data matches resolved within 2 months	Not applicable	100%	4
PM 12: Customers visited	4,360	204.5%	4
PM 16: Number of successful sanctions per 1,000 caseload	Not applicable	4.94	4

Source: Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

1.15 In 2006 we reported that the council met all of the 3 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against all 4 performance measures scored by the Department. We also reported that the council met 19 of the 21 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it met all 21.

1.16 The council maintained its strong performance in this area, with interventions targets comfortably exceeded. It also successfully applied 148 sanctions in 2006/07, a slight increase on its 2005/06 performance and well in excess of its target of 125.

1.17 During 2006/07, the council introduced payslip advertising to increase the publicity and provide guidance on making a fraud referral to all council staff. This supported its fraud awareness sessions provided at induction and we concluded that enabler E20 was now met.

1.18 It also introduced arrangements to monitor the time taken to commence investigations following referrals being sifted. This confirmed that investigations were commenced well within the 10 working days as required by Enabler E25.

User focus

1.19 Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council's performance measure data for User focus is shown in Figure 1.4.

Figure 1.4: User focus performance measures 2006/07						
Performance measure	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Full year	Score
PM 17: % of applications for reconsideration /revision actioned and notified within 4 weeks	65	91	90	92	86	4
PM 18: % of appeals submitted to the Appeals Service in 4 weeks	0	10	50	76	38	1
PM 19: % of appeals submitted to the Appeals Service in 3 months	50	67	75	100	76	1

Source: Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council
(Full year figures are based on an annual calculation and may not reflect the average of 4 quarters performance)

1.20 In 2006 we reported that the council met one of the 3 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against one of the 3 performance measures scored by the Department. We also reported that the council met 11 of the 12 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it still met 11.

1.21 Improved arrangements for handling appeals work were introduced during 2006/07 and included:

- passing routine administrative work to another officer, freeing up more time for the Appeals Officer to concentrate on compiling submissions
- using workflow process maps to ensure the Appeals Officer quickly received requests for an appeal hearing.

1.22 As a result of these improvements, performance against performance measures PM18 and PM19 improved significantly during the final 2 quarters of 2006/07.

Resource management

1.23 In 2006 we reported that the council met all of the 16 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it still met all 16.