

**REPORT TO:** Audit / Governance and Improvement Review Committee

**DATE:** 7 June 2007

**SUBJECT:** Departmental Performance

**REPORT OF:** Director of Finance and IT

**CONTACT OFFICER:** David Smith 01942-827232

**PURPOSE/SUMMARY:** To update Committee on the Department's performance in collecting council tax and national non-domestic rates, benefit payments and collection of income in 2006/07

**ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REASON FOR SELECTING THE ONE RECOMMENDED:**

**RECOMMENDATION/DECISION:** To note the report.

**KEY DECISION** This report does not involve a key decision.

**IMPLICATIONS:**

Financial: Resources contained within 2006/7 budget – additional resources obtained from DWP to support improved performance in processing benefit claims

Staffing:  
Policy:  
Equal Opportunities – Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?  
Wards Affected:  
Special Interest Members – Which have been consulted

**For Cabinet reports only :**

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

	<b>X</b>
Discussion	
Decision	
Information	

**Tracking/Process:**

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
7 June 2007			

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 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2007

## **BACKGROUND:**

This is the final report in a series of four during the year to this Committee which advises on progress during the financial year in collecting Community Charge, Council Tax and Business Rates.

This report also provides information regarding the collection of Sundry Debtor income along with performance in processing Benefits claims. This supplements the information on Benefits performance we have included in the Members information bulletin and helps ensure compliance with the Department for Work and Pensions Performance Standards.

The separate sections are attached as appendices:

Appendix A            Collection of Community Charge, Council Tax and Business Rates.

Appendix B            Collection of Sundry Debtor income.

Appendix C            Benefits Administration.

**1. Community Charge**

Arrears re Years (Net of Overpayments)	Position at				
	31/03/06		31/03/07		
	£	%	£	%	
1990/91	16,603	0.03	14,115	0.02	Reduction of £2,488
1991/92	54,486	0.12	24,959	0.05	Reduction of £29,527
1992/93	107,629	0.20	50,521	0.09	Reduction of £57,108
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>178,718</b>		<b>89,595</b>		Reduction of £89,123

**2. Non-Domestic Rates - Earlier Years**

Arrears re Years (Net of Overpayments)	Position at				
	31/03/06		31/03/07		
	£	%	£	%	
1990/91	-2,717	-0.01	-2,849	-0.01	Reduction of £132
1991/92	3,909	0.01	2,588	0.01	Reduction of £1,321
1992/93	8,532	0.03	5,988	0.02	Reduction of £2,544
1993/94	6,916	0.02	2,287	0.01	Reduction of £4,629
1994/95	16,412	0.06	6,508	0.02	Reduction of £9,904
1995/96	34,889	0.11	9,801	0.03	Reduction of £25,088
1996/97	62,530	0.18	37,225	0.11	Reduction of £25,305
1997/98	82,355	0.21	40,614	0.11	Reduction of £41,741
1998/99	104,485	0.24	60,031	0.14	Reduction of £44,454
1999/2000	228,553	0.49	99,260	0.21	Reduction of £129,293
2000/01	275,992	0.54	150,648	0.30	Reduction of £125,344
2001/02	365,854	0.66	172,436	0.31	Reduction of £193,418
2002/03	403,884	0.70	208,779	0.36	Reduction of £195,105
2003/04	571,152	0.98	333,392	0.57	Reduction of £237,760
2004/05	841,538	1.40	506,065	0.85	Reduction of £335,473
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,004,284</b>		<b>1,632,773</b>		Reduction of £1,371,511

**3. Non-Domestic Rates 2005/06**

	Position at				
	31/03/06		31/03/07		
	£	%	£	%	
Amount Collectable	61,766,845		61,687,568		Reduction of £79,277
Plus Costs	40,037		54,793		Increase of £14,756
	61,806,882		61,742,361		
Less Write-Offs	-66,820	0.11	-322,353	0.52	Increase of £255,533
Less Cash (Net of Refunds)	-60,235,620	97.46	-60,727,295	98.36	Increase of £491,675
Arrears	1,504,442	2.43	692,713	1.12	Reduction of £811,729

#### 4. Non-Domestic Rates 2006/2007

	Position at 31/03/07	
	£	%
Amount Collectable	64,919,204	
Plus Costs	47,288	
	64,966,492	
Less Write-Offs	-62,462	0.10
Less Cash (Net of Refunds)	-63,664,392	98.00
Arrears	1,239,638	1.90

Recovery action taken to 31/03/07

Formal Reminders	4,991
Summonses	1,031
Liability Orders	457
Direct Debit Payers	3,426

#### 5. Council Tax - Earlier Years

Arrears re Years (Net of Overpayments)	Position at				
	31/03/06		31/03/07		
	£	%	£	%	
1993/94	21,904	0.05	16,063	0.04	Reduction of £5,841
1994/95	26,626	0.06	16,805	0.04	Reduction of £9,821
1995/96	46,107	0.11	27,866	0.06	Reduction of £18,241
1996/97	83,271	0.17	53,457	0.11	Reduction of £29,814
1997/98	128,631	0.24	78,824	0.14	Reduction of £49,807
1998/99	180,947	0.31	112,001	0.19	Reduction of £68,946
1999/2000	263,059	0.42	188,317	0.30	Reduction of £74,742
2000/01	322,241	0.47	227,912	0.33	Reduction of £94,329
2001/02	430,938	0.58	305,859	0.41	Reduction of £125,079
2002/03	604,348	0.77	430,620	0.55	Reduction of £173,728
2003/04	920,315	1.07	656,547	0.76	Reduction of £263,768
2004/05	1,404,547	1.58	951,969	1.07	Reduction of £452,578
TOTAL	4,432,934		3,066,240		Reduction of £1,366,694

#### 6. Council Tax 2005/06

	Position at				
	31/03/06		31/03/07		
	£	%	£	%	
Amount Collectable	93,503,696		93,292,030		
Plus Costs	651,234		799,837		
	94,154,930		94,091,867		
Less Write-Offs	-13,354	0.01	-113,122	0.12	
Less Cash (Net of Refunds)	-91,188,833	96.85	-92,518,141	98.33	
Arrears	2,952,743	3.14	1,460,604	1.55	Reduction of £1,492,139

## 7. Council Tax 2006/2007

	<b>Position at 31/03/07</b>	
	<b>£</b>	<b>%</b>
Amount Collectable	97,198,793	
Plus Costs	720,741	
	97,919,534	
Less Write-Offs	-31,928	0.03
Less Cash (Net of Refunds)	-94,633,630	96.64
Arrears	3,253,976	3.33

Cases where nothing paid	3,784
Recovery action taken to 31/03/07	
Formal Reminders	59,154
Summonses	13,051
Liability Orders	10,359
Direct Debit Payers	66,695

## 8. Court Costs

The following Court Costs (Net of payments made to the Courts) have been paid during the financial years:

1990/91	£ 90,236
1991/92	£ 530,273
1992/93	£ 881,157
1993/94	£ 1,043,149
1994/95	£ 940,299
1995/96	£ 732,183
1996/97	£ 733,623
1997/98	£ 514,424
1998/99	£ 592,906
1999/00	£ 486,035
2000/01	£ 564,823
2001/02	£ 719,592
2002/03	£ 714,058
2003/04	£ 750,231
2004/05	£ 812,115
2005/06	£ 798,018
2006/07	£ 720,272
	<u>£ 11,623,394</u>

9. **Progress with Recovery after Liability Orders have been obtained.**

The situation regarding those payers against whom Liability Orders had been obtained was as follows at 31/03/07:-

<b>(a) <u>Council Tax</u></b> (in respect of financial years 1993 to 2005)	<b><u>Numbers</u></b>	<b><u>Amount</u></b> <b><u>Owing £</u></b>
Paying by voluntary arrangement	145	34,900
Employers details requested prior to Attachment of Earnings	1,406	441,103
Attachment of Earnings Pending	915	303,724
Attachment of Earnings in Operation	678	167,207
Deductions from Income Support Pending	2,765	737,662
Deductions from Income Support in Operation	1,551	270,817
Visited - arrangements made on distraint	2,354	577,812
Visited - awaiting Means Enquiry Court Hearing	795	224,527
Referred to private bailiffs	1,127	358,737
Various stages of Means Enquiry Court Hearings	1,764	576,204
Suspended Sentences imposed, payments ordered	414	171,705
Bankrupt / Deceased / Liability in dispute		
Other query	696	245,087
Absconded - trying to trace	1,134	393,692
Unable to Trace - for write-off	245	68,702
Bankruptcy Proceedings instigated	<u>95</u>	<u>41,615</u>
	16,084	4,613,494

Since the introduction of Council Tax:

181,197 liability orders have been obtained, of which 165,113 have since been cleared.

76,161 Attachment of Earnings Orders and

40,381 Deductions from Income Support have been implemented.

Deductions from Income Support now total £1,776,355

<b>(b) <u>NNDR</u></b> (in respect of financial years 1990 to 2005)	<b><u>Numbers</u></b>	<b><u>Amount</u></b> <b><u>Owing £</u></b>
Liability Order granted – Arrangement prior to action	11	25,768
Letter issued - Bailiff visit pending	70	85,591
In House & Private Bailiff action	286	425,453
Returned from bailiff – awaiting Means Enquiry Court Hearing	254	264,247
Various stages of Means Enquiry Court Hearings	279	353,559
Bankrupt / Deceased / Liability in dispute / Other query	132	342,507
Absconded - trying to trace	87	102,853
Unable to Trace - for write-off	286	530,259
Bankruptcy Proceedings instigated	<u>27</u>	<u>37,610</u>
	1,432	2,167,847

In the previous 2 tables, the “Numbers” shown at each stage of recovery relate to the number of accounts and not the number of debtors.

The number of debtors per financial year is:

<b><u>Council Tax</u></b>	<b><u>Numbers</u></b>	<b><u>Amount Owing £</u></b>
1 Financial Year	4,079	1,002,174
2 Financial Years	1,986	1,217,254
3 “ “	845	844,357
4 “ “	387	565,891
5 “ “	197	385,958
6 “ “	115	289,106
7 “ “	47	145,252
8 “ “	20	74,268
9 “ “	11	44,869
10 “ “	4	18,674
11 “ “	3	12,105
12 “ “	2	7,993
13 “ “	1	<u>5,653</u>
		4,613,494

<b><u>NDR</u></b>	<b><u>Numbers</u></b>	<b><u>Amount Owing £</u></b>
1 Financial Year	496	645,997
2 Financial Years	266	858,942
3 “ “	82	405,206
4 “ “	24	168,134
5 “ “	3	15,631
6 “ “	5	51,357
7 “ “	0	0
8 “ “	1	8,997
9 “ “	1	<u>13,583</u>
		2,167,847

## 10. Performance Indicators.

Annual targets in respect of the Corporate Health Best Value Performance Indicators relating to the in-year Collection of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates have been set for the 2006/07 financial year as:

Council Tax	97.3% (97.0% achieved for 2005/06)
Non-Domestic Rates	98.0% (97.2% achieved for 2005/06)

These have been determined against the Government's expectations that Councils will aspire to achieve collection rates by the 31 March 2007 which would see performance to be in the top quartile for "All England" authorities – 98.29% for Council Tax and 99.1% for NNDR.

The actual out-turn collection rates achieved for 2006/2007 are:

Council Tax	96.9%
Non-Domestic Rates	97.6%

The minor reduction in performance in Council Tax was due to delays in processing changes during the first 9 months of the year following a major upgrade to our electronic document management system in January 2006. We had hoped to completely pull-back the drop of about 0.5% we have experienced for most of the year in the final quarter but despite major efforts at recovery unfortunately this has not quite been achieved.

Whilst national and other GM Authorities comparative data for 2006/07 is not yet available, early indications from GM Authorities suggests there is a downward trend in collection of Council Tax.

We remain committed to improving our performance during 2007/08 and comparison of the first few weeks of the year indicates a slight improvement over last year of about 0.1%.

NNDR performance has improved back almost to the level of that achieved in the last financial year prior to the system conversion in February 2005 in preparation for the new 2005 Rating List and implementation of the new scheme of relief for Small Businesses.

Analysis of the 2006/07 outstanding debts at 31 March shows that of the total 980 cases, value £1.548m:

- 823 cases, value £1.2m, relate to commercial properties (shops, offices, pubs, etc.)

Rateable Value range	Number of Cases	Debt owed
Less than 5,000	363	152,174
Between 5,000 – 10,000	228	212,780
Between 10,000 – 15,000	76	143,648
Between 15,000 – 50,000	127	428,547
Between 50,000 – 100,000	19	149,315
Between 100,000 – 500,000	10	104,985
Over £500,000	0	0
Total	823	1,191,449

The previous table identifies that the majority of cases with arrears are small businesses (as defined by the rateable value limits that appertain to the 2005 scheme of relief for Small Businesses, i.e. less than £15,000) – 667 cases, value owed £508,602 – yet many of these are business in 2006/07 which have been awarded Small Business Relief amounting to over £1.5m. A considerable part of the debt however is owed by a much smaller number of medium sized businesses and so this is one area to focus on during 2007/08 to improve collection.

Type of Property	Number of Cases	Debt owed
Advertising Right	1	444
Garage / Petrol Station	13	17,841
Licensed (Pub / Club)	158	396,861
Office	149	86,554
Car Park	3	1,973
Restaurant / Café	25	22,258
Shop	379	482,209
Store	76	152,093
Other	19	31,216
Total	823	1,191,449

This table highlights the particular concern over the debt owed by the “licensed” premises. Analysis of the rateable properties throughout the Borough, 8,663, shows there are a total of 449 licensed premises - which equates to just over 5% of all properties. Given that 16% of the arrears cases relate to pubs and clubs, and which account for over 25% of the total arrears owed, this is an area we aim to focus debt recovery on during 2007/08. We have held preliminary discussions with the Licensing Section, Environmental Services Department, and subject to any restrictions that data protection may apply, we aim to introduce an early cross-referencing of applications for transfer of licences to enable us to have more speedier information of changes in the licensee and therefore an earlier start to the billing and recovery processes.

- The remaining 157 cases, with a combined debt of £356k, are mainly industrial properties (factories, workshops etc.). Analysis shows:

Rateable Value range	Number of Cases	Debt owed
Less than 5,000	53	36,685
Between 5,000 – 10,000	40	41,139
Between 10,000 – 15,000	22	30,536
Between 15,000 – 50,000	33	150,359
Between 50,000 – 100,000	7	55,850
Between 100,000 – 500,000	1	35,165
Over £500,000	1	6,928
Total	157	356,662

The arrears have also been analysed according to areas based on the constituent authorities prior to local government re-organisation in 1974 – to identify relative performance across the particular areas of the borough, results show:

Area	Number of Cases	Cases as % of total arrears cases	Debt Owed	Debt as % of total debt	Total Properties in Area	%	Arrears cases as % of Properties in Area
Abram	11	1.1%	19,311	1.2%	91	1.1%	12.1%
Ashton	54	5.5%	98,926	6.4%	634	7.3%	8.5%
Aspull	22	2.2%	20,654	1.3%	165	1.9%	13.3%
Atherton	68	6.9%	82,304	5.3%	629	7.3%	10.8%
Billinge	7	0.7%	3,771	0.2%	99	1.1%	7.1%
Golborne	31	3.2%	18,793	1.2%	308	3.6%	10.1%
Hindley	83	8.5%	129,603	8.4%	631	7.3%	13.2%
Ince	57	5.8%	65,277	4.2%	458	5.3%	12.4%
Leigh	203	20.7%	348,405	22.5%	1,550	17.9%	13.1%
Orrell	17	1.7%	23,799	1.5%	162	1.9%	10.5%
Standish	59	6.0%	58,982	3.8%	436	5.0%	13.5%
Tyldesley	63	6.4%	85,453	5.5%	551	6.4%	11.4%
Wigan	280	28.6%	565,192	36.5%	2,648	30.6%	10.6%
Lowton	9	0.9%	15,640	1.0%	179	2.1%	5.0%
Haigh	5	0.5%	4,491	0.3%	30	0.3%	16.7%
Shevington	11	1.1%	7,510	0.5%	86	1.0%	12.8%
Worthington	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	0.1%	0%
Total	980		1,548,111		8,663		11.3%

Previous reports to this Committee have advised our intentions to make every effort to try and improve this poor performing PI and Members will re-call that from August, on a trial basis, bailiff work has been placed with an external enforcement agency. The aim of using external bailiffs was to achieve more success in trying to establish contact with some of the firms that our own officers experienced difficulty in doing so due to them being “late opening” establishments.

During 2006/07, I can report that 677 liability orders in respect of the current and previous years were passed over to Rossendales. The total debt referred amounting to just over £1.5m.

At 31 March, a total of 168 liability orders had been collected in full, amounting to £281,427, and a further £173,466 has been collected by the company against cases that still have bailiff action ongoing.

A number of cases have been returned where action has not been successful - mainly due to insolvency or requiring further trace work.

The Assistant Director (Revenue Services) and Chief Recovery Officer have met with senior representatives from Rossendales this week to review progress during 2006/07, to understand the current position, and determine the ongoing situation for 2007/08.

We have been encouraged by their actions and results during this trial period in 2006/07 and their report shows that at 31 March they had collected almost 35% of the debt referred to them. This compares extremely favourably to other similar metropolitan authorities, including neighbouring and GM Authorities, and it is recommended that work continue to be placed with this firm during 2007/08. Monitoring will continue and progress regularly reported to this Committee.

More information about PI's in respect of 2006/07 both locally and nationally will be provided to this Committee as soon as available.

The current position in respect of Council Tax, NNDR and Poll Tax amounts collected in respect of all relevant financial years is given below to demonstrate the continuing progress made after the end of each financial year.

<b>Council Tax</b>	<b>Amount Due</b>	<b>Amount Paid</b>	<b>% Collected</b>
1993/94	44,726,251	44,520,550	99.54%
1994/95	41,302,601	41,144,201	99.62%
1995/96	43,818,818	43,646,262	99.61%
1996/97	50,011,183	49,780,617	99.54%
1997/98	54,487,636	54,194,974	99.46%
1998/99	57,714,935	57,361,674	99.39%
1999/2000	63,096,062	62,636,091	99.27%
2000/01	68,145,562	67,576,077	99.16%
2001/02	74,530,605	73,928,613	99.19%
2002/03	78,871,167	78,173,476	99.12%
2003/04	86,080,017	85,202,404	98.98%
2004/05	89,133,535	88,041,682	98.78%
2005/06	94,091,868	92,518,141	98.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>846,010,240</b>	<b>838,724,762</b>	<b>99.14%</b>

<b>NNDR</b>	<b>Amount Due</b>	<b>Amount Paid</b>	<b>% Collected</b>
1990/91	37,683,645	37,018,432	98.23%
1991/92	37,770,004	37,246,450	98.61%
1992/93	32,625,346	32,233,132	98.80%
1993/94	28,418,359	28,050,357	98.71%
1994/95	29,384,844	29,091,887	99.00%
1995/96	32,486,236	32,145,316	98.95%
1996/97	34,947,149	34,539,994	98.83%
1997/98	38,543,885	38,064,630	98.76%
1998/99	43,594,204	43,035,527	98.72%
1999/2000	46,986,409	46,229,688	98.39%
2000/01	51,065,533	50,354,122	98.61%
2001/02	55,104,537	54,386,251	98.70%
2002/03	57,286,115	56,607,722	98.82%
2003/04	58,059,239	57,371,216	98.81%
2004/05	59,870,323	59,027,289	98.59%
2005/06	61,742,362	60,727,295	98.36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>705,568,190</b>	<b>696,129,308</b>	<b>98.66%</b>

<b>Poll Tax</b>	<b>Amount Due</b>	<b>Amount Paid</b>	<b>% Collected</b>
1990/91	63,872,296	63,005,766	98.64%
1991/92	45,950,732	45,192,032	98.35%
1992/93	53,523,880	52,560,812	98.20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>163,346,908</b>	<b>160,758,610</b>	<b>98.42%</b>

## 11. **Update on Bankruptcy Action.**

Since starting bankruptcy proceedings, we have instigated action against 89 people with a total debt of over £500,000. Of these cases, 36 people have paid in full and a total amount of £276,632 has been recovered.

19 people have been made bankrupt, and a Charging Order has been obtained on 1 person's property. The combined debt in these cases amounting to £101,313. The Official Receiver or appointed trustee are now looking to recover the debt via the sale of assets.

The remaining 33 cases are at various stages of action.

Members are reminded that:

- Use of these proceedings is restricted to cases where we have already undertaken preliminary Land Registry searches which suggest ownership of property and therefore offer good prospects for payment
- Bankruptcy proceedings are initiated as a last resort and only in respect of considerable debt and after all other methods of recovery available have been exhausted or cannot be used. Initially, we targeted cases with a total debt of about £5,000, now some 18 months into use of bankruptcy action, this amount has reduced to about £3,000.

## 12. Collection of Sundry Debtor Income

### 1. Background:

The Income Group collects Sundry and Periodic Income due from invoices raised by Council Departments, the Leisure Trust and GM Fire Authority. A comparison for the activity relating to Wigan Council for the years 2005/06 and 2006/07 is shown below:

Details	April 05 – Mar 06	April 06 – Mar 07
Invoices	41,476	40,960
Value £m	63.7	62.6

These results show little change in the comparison of the two years and it seems that invoicing has now settled down after periods of change.

Wigan Council also undertakes debt recovery work for the Leisure Trust and the GM Fire Service. From April 2006 to March 2007, they raised invoices valued at £25.4m and £2.8m, respectively. Details relating to the activity will be reported to the Leisure Trust and GM Fire Service separately.

### 2. Summary of Performance Information for Wigan Council.

Performance information is supplied to the Greater Manchester Authorities Metropolitan Treasurer's Group (GMAMT) and a copy of the return for the year up to the end of March 2007 is shown here:

Details	Value
B/Fwd at 01.04.06	£7.3 m
Raised 2006-2007	£62.6 m
Total	£69.9 m

Debt over 3 months old	£867 k	1.03 %
Debt with Legal	£80 k	0.08 %

#### i) Debt over 3 months: March 2006 compared to March 2007

The debt over 3 months old has reduced by £433k to £867k.

#### ii) Debt with Legal Services:

Only few cases are referred to Legal and the debt referred has increased by £10k to £80k.

### 3. Further Improvements to Statistical Returns:

As previously reported, the external comparisons with other Councils (supplied by GMAMT) again showed Wigan's position as excellent being best in 2005/06 over a range of quality and performance related measures.

Wigan is a member of two Debtors' benchmarking clubs – CIPFA and GMAMT and has provided information for both on an annual basis for some years. At the last GMAMT meeting it was decided that we would all join the CIPFA club and provide information to them. We would then be able to sort the returns by Council and compare ourselves to the other GMAMT Councils, thus precluding us from the necessity of completing two questionnaires. The information does take CIPFA some time to collate, being a national survey and it is timetabled that this final return will be available in August 2007, after which details will be reported.

The industry standards for debt recovery analysis is Debtors Days which shows that average number of days it takes to collect debt. The figures for Wigan for 2006/07 are shown here:

Month	Debtor Days
April 06	54.2
May 06	43.4
June 06	40.4
July 06	37.0
Aug 06	37.4
Sept 06	38.6
Oct 06	37.3
Nov 06	38.4
Dec 06	39.2
Jan 07	40.1
Feb 07	40.7
Mar 07	40.3
Average	40.6

At the end of March 2006, the Debtor Days was recorded as 44.11 days. As you can see from the above table, there has been general continuing improvement throughout the rolling year, but it seems to have found the natural level at just under 40 days, bringing in the annual figure at 40.6 days. Compared to other GMAMT Authorities, Wigan Council had the best score in this category in 2005-2006, the average time to collect a debt in all GM Authorities was 68 days, although this may be improved in 2006-2007.

As an indication, this recovery rate produces an interest saving benefit of around £8.5k per annum for each debtor day that is reduced.

#### **4. Improvements to Communications:**

i) User Group Meetings:

Two user group meetings have now been held since they were recommenced in September 2006. These have allowed questions and issues to be raised and seek improvements and solutions to problems and to make suggestions.

ii) User Training:

New and refresher training has been offered since December 2006 and 17 people have been trained. This should go some way to increasing effectiveness and efficiency in user Departments.

#### **5. Conclusions:**

The Income Group has performed very well this year and won a prize in the Best Value category in the Team of the Year Competition.

The statistics for 2006-2007 are in the pipeline and will be reported as soon as possible, but other Councils are also working hard to improve their procedures and processes and statistics. The Income Group are striving to continuously improve and to perform better and to continue to deliver an excellent service to both Departments and customers.

**13. Benefits Administration**

**Claim Processing**

During the early part of 2006 we were recovering from major system changes that had a negative effect upon performance. However, following that difficult period, performance has dramatically improved and continues to do so. Consequently, the average processing times for the year do not reflect the true situation since September 2006 and the following table seeks to illustrate the achievements made over the year:

<b>Performance Category</b>	<b>Period 01/04/06 to 31/03/07</b>	<b>01/04/06 to 30/09/06</b>	<b>01/10/06 to 31/03/07</b>	<b>2006/07 Target</b>
New claims (days to process)	34	40.4	28	30
Changes in Circumstances (days to process)	11	13.9	8	10

It can be seen from the above figures that we are well within target from October 2006 onwards.

**Intervention Visits**

Benefit interventions are designed around monthly data matches and risk-based reviews and replaced benefit renewal forms. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) target of 13,480 has been comfortably achieved as follows:

Home Visits	8,927
Postal checks	3,923
Data matches	<u>1,051</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>13,901</u></b>

**Benefit Fraud**

In the area of fraud detection and prevention, the following table indicates the numbers of sanctions made in 2006/07. As can be seen, this exceeds the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) target of 125 for the year.

<b>Sanction Applied</b>	<b>No. of Cases</b>
LA Caution (similar to a police caution)	77
Administrative Penalty	32
Successful Prosecutions	39
<b>Total Achievement for the year</b>	<b>148</b>

*(118.4 % of the annual target set by the DWP)*

Performance for the new financial year continues to meet the standards set.

## **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)**

The total amount awarded for 2006/07 was £55,167.98 of which the Government contribution for 2006/07 was £47,222. This is the first year that expenditure has exceeded the Government contribution, which illustrates the increase in applications for additional help, over and above the amount of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit awarded under the statutory scheme.