

## **WIRRAL COUNCIL**

### **FINANCE AND BEST VALUE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**17 JANUARY 2008**

#### **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE**

#### **COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT– BENEFITS**

### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report outlines the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) review process for the Benefits Service for 2007 and concludes that the Benefits Service has been assessed as Excellent with a score of 4.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Since 2002, as a part of the CPA process, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) has undertaken improvement reporting on the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service on an annual basis, the aim being to identify changes in service delivery since the initial assessment and assess current levels of performance.
- 2.2. The BFI base the assessment on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) 'Performance Standards' which provides continuity and ensures that there is a clear understanding of what an effective and efficient benefit service should be achieving in terms of output and key processes. The Performance Standards comprise 19 'performance measures' and 65 'key enablers'. The 'measures' include many recognisable Best Value Performance Indicators whilst the 'enablers' look at policies, processes and plans.
- 2.3. I am required to complete a self- assessment against the Performance Standards and additionally provide a narrative report detailing factors that have affected performance during the year. Both the report and self-assessment must be evidenced.

### **3. CURRENT POSITION**

- 3.1 For the first three years the Benefits Service secured the top CPA score of 4 excellent. Last year the service was assessed as "good" and scored 3 due to one area Appeals which was specifically influenced by a number of supporting appeals which affected overall response times in this area of the service. There had been significant changes to the Performance Measures, each essentially applying a 'harder test' in several areas which the Authority had met.

- 3.2 For 2007, the BFI again used a '4-point' scale in line with other inspectorates undertaking CPA, together with the established single word labels:
- |   |   |           |
|---|---|-----------|
| 4 | - | Excellent |
| 3 | - | Good      |
| 2 | - | Fair      |
| 1 | - | Poor      |
- 3.3 In keeping with previous years, the Performance Measures have again been reviewed for 2007.
- 3.4 The key focus again reflects the importance of Claims Administration and Security. Other areas of User Focus and Resource Management remain largely unaltered. Each area is scored between 1 and 4.
- 3.5 The key change was to Security and how the Authority performed in the activity of counter fraud and error throughout 2006/07, which had a significant impact on the 2007 review. For Wirral the most significant improvement was in user focus which moved from a score of 2 to 4. The low score in 2006 was specific to the issue of Appeals response times.
- 3.6 The period over which performance is measured and reported via self-assessment of performance was for the whole of 2006/07 and the review process was completed by 1 July 2007.

#### **4. THE 2007 REVIEW**

- 4.1 The result of the review against the Standards is a 'combined' overall score of:
- 4 = Excellent.
- 4.2 The combined assessment is derived from applying weightings to the Performance Measures and Enablers. The outcome of this exercise shows that the service achieves a top score of 4 in all four measured areas of Claims Administration, Security, User Focus and Resource Management.
- 4.3. The challenge for Wirral in the 2007/08 assessment will be in the low returns nationally on one of the Measures, PM10, the number of downward changes identified. Most local authorities have made it clear to the DWP they will "score" low on this given the overall strong performance in other areas of Benefits Administration leaving fewer downward changes to identify than DWP projected when setting up the gradings. Unless the DWP accepts this argument many local authorities including Wirral may record as low as Level 2. Generally it is accepted that if a local authority scores more than two "Level 2"s throughout all areas then the maximum overall assessment for Benefits can only be a 3.

- 4.4. The CPA Benefits score in 2006 was affected solely by the Appeals handling timescales on Supporting People issues which are likely to be settled in early 2008. These claims on being processed will be viewed as old appeals and the performance standard will be affected adversely. I will continue to ensure, as much as possible, that performance in other areas is maintained at previous levels to reflect the ongoing high service standards.

## **5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no specific implications arising directly from this report.

## **6 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no specific implications arising directly from this report.

## **7 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no specific implications arising directly from this report.

## **8 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no specific implications arising directly from this report.

## **9 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no specific implications arising directly from this report.

## **10 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no specific implications arising directly from this report.

## **11 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no specific implications arising directly from this report.

## **12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1 HB – CTB Performance Standards – Department for Work and Pensions March 2007.

## **13 RECOMMENDATION**

- 13.1 That the report be noted.

IAN COLEMAN  
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE