

WIRRAL COUNCIL

COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 APRIL 2009

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT 2008 - BENEFITS SERVICE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report outlines the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) review process for the Benefits Service for 2008. The Benefits Service has been assessed as Excellent with a score of 4. This is the final CPA report. Significant changes were made to the inspection process from April 2008 transferring responsibility from the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate to the Audit Commission including the introduction of Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE).

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 to assess current levels of performance.
- 2.2. Historically, the BFI has based 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.
- 2.3. The original Performance Standards comprise 19 'performance measures' and 65 'key enablers' and whilst the Wirral Benefits Service continues to use these measures to monitor the service at a local level, for the purposes of the final CPA, the Audit Commission has adopted what might reasonably be described as a somewhat 'lighter touch' approach for the final assessment under the old regime, essentially looking only at achievement against the more critical Claims Administration, Security and User Focus performance measures, while disregarding the 'Enablers' and removing the requirement for the Authority to submit the supplementary 'narrative report'.

- 2.4. In undertaking their assessment, the Audit Commission additionally accessed performance data records held by the DWP which include out turn figures against the Key Best Value Performance Indicators.

3. CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 Since the introduction of the CPA in 2002, Wirral has secured a top score of 4 and rating as 'excellent' annually with the exception of one year only, when the service for 2006 was assessed as a three star 'good' purely as a result of inordinate work volumes and complexity with one accommodation provider.

- 3.2 For 2008, the Audit Commission has retained the '4-point' scale in line with other inspectorates undertaking CPA work together with the established single word labels:

4	-	Excellent
3	-	Good
2	-	Fair
1	-	Poor

- 3.3 The period over which performance is evaluated was April 2007 to March 2008 and the review process with the completed return was submitted to the Audit Commission in June 2008.

4. THE 2008 ASSESSMENT

- 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. In the 13 performance measure Wirral scored 4 in eleven categories and 3 in two. The overall weighted figure is given as 3.79 which is rounded up to 4.

- 4.3. The challenge in terms of future service inspection is the move to the new Key Lines of Enquiry. Reputed to be a much 'harder test' and distinctly different in terms of inspection focus, the Audit Commission has already highlighted the degree of change and likely impact this change is likely to have on inspection outcomes.

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 Audit Commission CPA 2008 Letter and Scorecard March 2009.

13. RECOMMENDATION.

13.1 That the report be noted.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE