

Bedford Borough Council

Benefit Service: Summary of current performance

Overall, we found that Bedford Borough Council's Benefits service was providing a **Fair towards Good** performance. Bedford Borough Council's current performance demonstrates a number of strengths. These include:

- a range of policies and strategies that impact on the Benefits service
- a closely monitored performance management framework
- service and improvement planning
- Investor in People accreditation for the whole council, in July 1997, July 2000 and July 2003
- Customer Service Charter Mark awarded in 2002
- public enquiry counter and telephone enquiry lines which are open for 42 hours per week, including Saturday mornings
- compliance with Verification Framework since 1999
- recently met upper quartile performance for all speed of processing Best Value Performance Indicators
- maintenance of upper quartile performance for accuracy of processing
- management checking, including management checking of fraud work
- a culture which encourages external consultation and partnerships
- liaison with landlords of all types
- IT security
- control of overpayments, including maintenance of upper quartile performance for overpayment recovery.

However, there are some areas where Bedford Borough Council needs to develop further to fully meet the BFI and Department for Work and Pensions' (the Department) Performance Standards framework. These include:

- no reference to the Benefits service in the Corporate Plan
- Bedford Borough Council's claim form does not follow the Department's model
- no monitoring of the Benefits service's telephone answering targets or caller waiting times
- not meeting Performance Standards target for responding to 80% of correspondence within 14 days
- no monitoring of the service level agreements with Jobcentre Plus, The Pension Service and the Rent Service

- not meeting Performance Standards for compliance with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, in respect of publishing results
- current fraud business plan does not include targets for prosecutions, sanctions and administrative penalties.

How BFI's current performance assessment informs the Audit Commission's overall assessment is described [here](#).