

Blyth Valley Borough Authority

Benefit Service: Summary of current performance

Overall, we found that Blyth Valley Borough Council's HB and CTB service is providing a **Fair towards Good** performance. Blyth Valley Borough Council's current performance demonstrates a number of strengths. These include:

- recognition of Performance Management as an essential tool in the effective and efficient delivery of the Benefits service
- the 3 year Revenues Services *Service and Improvement Plan* sets targets to achieve top quartile performance in all areas by 2004/05
- the council has achieved top quartile performance for processing new claims and changes of circumstances over the last 2 years
- the recently introduced claim form incorporates many of the BFI's recommendations for ease of use
- investment in a new IT system and document imaging system for the Benefits section
- an arms length management company, Blyth Valley Housing Ltd. was set up in April 2002 to manage all council properties. A Service Level Agreement, reviewed annually, is in place
- declarations of interest are obtained from staff and Members. Both Members and employees have a Code of Conduct
- comprehensive Counter-fraud policy and procedures manuals are in place
- the council takes a proactive approach to limit overpayments entering the system
- an Overpayments Policy and clear Overpayments Procedures have been developed.

However there are some areas where Blyth Valley Borough Council needs to develop further to more fully meet the BFI and the Department's Performance Standards framework. These include:

- the requirement to carry out a full self assessment against Performance Standards
- the setting of targets to monitor the response to telephone callers and the time taken to reply to correspondence
- to implement the Verification Framework
- the application of the 'fit and proper' test for landlords
- implementation of vetting procedures for new employees, based upon the Audit Commission recommendations for recruitment

- the requirement to set targets for reducing the numbers and amounts of inactive debt.

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