

Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2007

Birmingham City Council

Introduction

1.1 This assessment has been undertaken as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) programme and does not represent a full inspection of Birmingham City Council's Benefits service. This report has been produced pursuant to powers contained in sections 10 and 11 of the Local Government Act 1999.

1.2 We gathered information for this assessment from a range of sources including:

- the self-assessment and evidence provided by the council
- Best Value Performance Indicators and performance measures
- discussions with senior officers in the council
- BFI's CPA 2006 report.

Overall Performance

1.3 In 2006 we reported that the council met 7 of the 12 performance measures and 63 of the 65 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against 8 of the 13 performance measures scored by the Department and 62 of the 65 enablers. This resulted in the scores reflected below:

Performance Standards score	Excellent
Audit Commission score	4

1.4 The council introduced a new Benefits IT system in the last quarter of 2005/06. The expected dip in performance during the first quarter of 2006/07 had been effectively managed and performance levels had recovered by the second quarter of 2006/07. The council had succeeded in exceeding its own deadlines for the speed of the recovery and had also improved its overall levels of performance.

1.5 Further improvements to its counter-fraud operation had resulted in an increase of 40% in the numbers of successful sanctions being applied, with further improvements expected now that new working practices and structures had been implemented.

1.6 Birmingham City Council provided a full self-assessment against 2006 HB/CTB Performance Standards. The evidence provided by the council supported its self-assessment.

1.7 Figure 1.1 compares the scores for the individual Performance Standards theme scores for CPA 2006 and CPA 2007 to highlight any changes in reported performance.

Figure 1.1: Performance Standards theme scores

Theme	2006	2007	Change
Claims administration	3	4	↑
Security	4	4	=
User focus	3	4	↑
Resource management	4	4	=
Overall score	4	4	=

Source: BFI analysis

Findings

Claims administration

1.8 Birmingham City Council's performance measure data for Claims administration is shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Claims administration performance measures 2006/07						
Performance measure	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Full year	Score
PM 1: Average time for processing new claims (days)	45	28	23	20	29	4
PM 2: % of new claims outstanding over 50 days	21	Missing	1	1	1	4
PM 3: % of new claims decided within 14 days of receiving all information	72	88	89	94	85	3
PM 4: % of rent allowance claims paid on time or within 7 days of a decision being made	88	88	96	96	91	4
PM 5: Average time for processing changes of circumstances (days)	28	18	16	9	18	3
PM 6: % of cases for which the calculation of the amount of benefit due is correct	98	97	100	100	98	3

Source: Birmingham City Council
(Full year figures are based on an annual calculation and may not reflect the average of 4 quarters performance)

1.9 In 2006 we reported that the council met 3 of the 6 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against 3 of the 6 performance measures scored by the Department. We also reported that the council met 15 of the 16 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it met 14.

1.10 The council's performance in claims administration in 2006/07 reflected the effectiveness of its planning and control mechanisms. Its stated intention to return to levels of performance achieved before the introduction of its new Benefits IT system in December 2005, had been exceeded. In particular, the council had achieved its highest level of performance in processing new claims.

1.11 A number of initiatives had been instrumental in the council's achievement, including:

- comprehensive training of all staff involved in the process, some 1,500 people, during and immediately after the 5 week close down for conversion to the new Benefits IT system
- effective workload management process, including weekly progress reports to senior managers before, during and after implementation
- detailed recovery plans implemented after migration to the new Benefits IT system
- engagement and monitoring of external resource to clear build up of work following system close down to facilitate conversion to new system.

1.12 The council undertook a range of post-notification management checks across all aspects of the service and the results were stored in a database that was accessible to all levels of the service to support the performance framework structure. As part of its planning for the implementation of its new Benefits IT system, the council undertook analysis of its current checking regime to determine where its resources were best placed. As a result a decision was taken to use the resources to assist with recovery of performance.

1.13 Pre-notification checks were carried out, but did not represent 4% of decisions made as specified in enabler E9.

1.14 The council had also failed to meet enabler E13 because its new Benefits IT system did not have the correct interface to allow returned benefit cheques to be taken into account when calculating overpayments promptly. It was in the process of developing the interface at the time of this assessment and intended to have it in place in time for the 2008 CPA assessment.

Security

1.15 In April 2006, Performance Standards were revised to include a scoring mechanism for performance measure PM16. This takes account of the number of successful sanctions applied in relation to a council's live caseload.

1.16 Birmingham City Council's performance measure data for Security is shown in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3: Security Performance measure scores 2006/07			
Performance measure	Annual target	Performance	Score
PM 10: Interventions where review action completed	56,820	110%	4
PM 11: Data matches resolved within 2 months	not applicable	100%	4
PM 12: Customers visited	18,940	131%	4
PM 16: Number of successful sanctions per 1,000 caseload	not applicable	3	3

Source: Birmingham City Council

1.17 In 2006 we reported that the council met all of the 3 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against 3 of the 4 performance measures scored by the Department. We also reported that the council met all of the 21 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it continued to meet all 21 enablers.

1.18 The Benefit Counter Fraud Team undertook a comprehensive re-engineering process during 2006/07, to refocus its efforts on the prevention and detection of fraud. The team's activities were separated into 3 key functions:

- intelligence strategy team, including data matching and strategic risk assessment
- investigation
- closure – including overpayment calculations, legal aspects and administration.

1.19 The council expanded its joint working with local authority neighbours through the West Midlands Fraud Investigations Group. A combination of these initiatives enabled the council to achieve 402 successful sanctions in 2006/07, including 93 prosecutions, 147 administrative penalties and 162 cautions. This represents a 40% increase on the number of sanctions applied in 2005/06.

User focus

1.20 Birmingham City Council's performance measure data for User focus is shown in Figure 1.4.

Figure 1.4: User focus performance measures 2006/07						
Performance measure	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Full year	Score
PM 17: % of applications for reconsideration /revision actioned and notified within 4 weeks	87	96	97	81	91	4
PM 18: % of appeals submitted to the Appeals Service in 4 weeks	60	49	54	89	66	4
PM 19: % of appeals submitted to the Appeals Service in 3 months	90	77	86	100	91	3

Source: Birmingham City Council

(Full year figures are based on an annual calculation and may not reflect the average of 4 quarters performance)

1.21 In 2006 we reported that the council met 2 of the 3 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against 2 of the 3 performance measures scored by the Department. We also reported that the council met all of the 12 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it continued to meet all 12 enablers.

1.22 The council continued its long-standing commitment to take up work achieving a 14% increase on the 2005/06 level of benefit paid to its customers.

1.23 Performance against PM17 for handling reconsiderations and revisions had improved significantly, from 66% in 2005/06 to 91% in 2006/07. This was the result of the Appeal Section providing awareness sessions to all Benefits staff, which highlighted that the need to make good decisions on disputes was a service wide responsibility.

1.24 The council's performance on dealing with appeals had also improved as more staff had been trained and were competent in preparing appeals submissions.

Resource management

1.25 In 2006 we reported that the council met 15 of the 16 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it continued to meet the same 15 enablers.

1.26 The council had identified issues with the accuracy and timeliness of information it had provided to the Department. At the time of this assessment the council was working to resolve these issues and told us that it expected to meet this enabler fully in 2007/08.