

Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2007

Blackpool Borough 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 Blackpool Borough 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 We concluded that Blackpool Borough Council achieved an excellent score in 7 of the 13 performance measures that were scored by the Department and met all of the 65 enablers. This resulted in the scores reflected below:

Performance Standards score	Good
Audit Commission score	3

1.4 The council had maintained its excellent performance against all Performance measures until the third quarter of 2006/07. A new Benefits IT system was implemented from 5 January and the resultant 5-week close down of processing leading up to the implementation date had affected its performance in processing new claims and changes of circumstances, including those generated by interventions activity, in the third quarter of the year.

1.5 The council had developed comprehensive plans to recover its former performance by the end of quarter 3 2007/08, including securing additional funding to address the backlog accrued during the system close down and weekly monitoring of the backlog position.

1.6 Blackpool Borough 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	4	3	↓
Security	4	3	↓
User focus	4	4	=
Resource management	4	4	=
Overall score	4	3	↓

Source: BFI analysis

Findings

Claims administration

1.8 Blackpool Borough 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)	23	24	27	52	31	3
PM 2: % of new claims outstanding over 50 days	7	18	20	49	49	1
PM 3: % of new claims decided within 14 days of receiving all information	88	80	78	69	78	2
PM 4: % of rent allowance claims paid on time or within 7 days of a decision being made	97	95	97	91	96	4
PM 5: Average time for processing changes of circumstances (days)	9	8	8	17	10	3
PM 6: % of cases for which the calculation of the amount of benefit due is correct	98	99	99	100	99	3

Source: Blackpool Borough 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 all of the 6 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved rating of excellent in one of the performance measures scored by the Department. We also reported that the council met all of the 16 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it continued to meet all 16 enablers.

1.10 Blackpool Borough Council's performance in claims administration had deteriorated in quarter 3 because of the implementation of its new Benefits IT system. The council had actively encouraged its customers to submit claims ahead of the implementation of its new system, which increased its workload. In addition, it had been unable to process work for a period of 5 weeks before the new system go-live date of 5 January 2007. The combination of these 2 factors lead to a significant backlog of work.

1.11 The council had developed an implementation plan that took account of the likely disruption and the inevitable drop in performance. Customers and stakeholders had been kept informed throughout the process and were being regularly updated on progress against the backlog of work.

Security

1.12 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.

1.13 Blackpool Borough Council's performance measure data for Security is shown in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3: Security performance measures 2006/07			
Performance measure	Annual target	Performance	Score
PM 10: Interventions where review action completed	9390	86%	2
PM 11: Data matches resolved within 2 months	not applicable	94%	4
PM 12: Customers visited	3130	115%	4
PM 16: Number of successful sanctions per 1,000 caseload	not applicable	16	4

Source: Blackpool Borough Council

1.14 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 of the enablers.

1.15 The council's failure to achieve an excellent rating against performance measure PM10 was attributed to the backlog of work caused by the implementation of its new Benefits IT system.

1.16 The council had however, maintained its performance undertaking and successfully completing fraud investigations. The council applied 340 sanctions, including 104 successful prosecutions, during 2006/07.

1.17 Since winning the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation award for Best Anti-Fraud Team in 2005, the council had provided expert advice to numerous councils, directly through job-shadowing, by providing copies of policies and procedures, delivering presentations and publishing articles for professional publications.

User focus

1.18 Blackpool Borough 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	90	91	29	79	4
PM 18: % of appeals submitted to the Appeals Service in 4 weeks	100	100	100	100	100	4
PM 19: % of appeals submitted to the Appeals Service in 3 months	100	100	100	100	100	4

Source: Blackpool Borough Council

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

1.19 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 all 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.

1.20 The council had maintained its performance in handling reconsiderations, revisions and appeals. In addition, it had improved its service to its customers through a number of initiatives, including:

- provision of a benefits bus service for 4 weeks each year, jointly procured with the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities
- provision of Debt and Money Management Advice Officers
- achievement of Charter Mark accreditation for front line, visiting and telephone services.

Resource management

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

1.22 The council's performance against its service plans was monitored at team and management levels, on a weekly or monthly basis. Quarterly performance reports were produced for the Strategic Director and Members.

1.23 The Executive Director received weekly updates on progress against clearance of the backlog of work resulting from the new Benefits IT System implementation. Action to clear the backlog was proceeding according to plan and it was expected that this would be cleared by the end of quarter 3 2007/08.