

Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2007

Dudley Metropolitan 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 Dudley Metropolitan 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 In 2006 we reported that the council met 10 of the 12 performance measures and 41 of the 65 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against 10 of the 13 performance measures scored by the Department and met 54 of the 65 enablers. This resulted in the scores reflected below.

Performance Standards score	Excellent
Audit Commission score	4

1.4 While retaining the overall score of Excellent, during 2006/07 the council fully utilised its Benefits IT system to improve processes and procedures and drive performance improvement. It introduced the following:

- a Debtors Module that managed housing benefit debt recovery from invoice issue to referral to debt recovery agencies and the council's legal department
- an Appeals Module that provided detailed performance management information
- improved reports and management information that identified gaps in performance information.

1.5 The introduction of mobile working for its visiting officers streamlined processes and also resulted in a reduction in processing times.

1.6 Following the BFI inspection in 2006, counter-fraud policies and procedures were improved, comprehensive management checking systems were put in place and a business plan was introduced.

1.7 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council provided a full self-assessment against 2006 HB/CTB Performance Standards. The evidence provided by the council supported its self-assessment.

1.8 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	4	=
Security	3	3	=
User focus	4	4	=
Resource management	4	4	=
Overall score	4	4	=

Source: BFI analysis

Findings

Claims administration

1.9 Dudley Metropolitan 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)	25	23	20	20	22	4
PM 2: % of new claims outstanding over 50 days	2.1	2.6	0.8	0.4	0.4	4
PM 3: % of new claims decided within 14 days of receiving all information	92	93	96	95	94	4
PM 4: % of rent allowance claims paid on time or within 7 days of a decision being made	92	94	97	99	96	4
PM 5: Average time for processing changes of circumstances (days)	16	16	12	10	14	3
PM 6: % of cases for which the calculation of the amount of benefit due is correct	99	98	99	99	99	3

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

1.10 In 2006 we reported that the council met 4 of the 6 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against 4 of the 6 performance measures scored by the Department. We also reported that the council met 10 of the 16 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it still met 10.

1.11 The council maintained its excellent performance against performance measures PM 1- 4. While not achieving the same level for performance measures PMs 5 and 6, it increased the score for PM5 by reducing the average time for processing changes of circumstances from an average of 16 days in 2005/06 to an average of 14 days in 2006/07.

1.12 In September 2006 the council implemented a *Fast Track Promise* scheme. The scheme was introduced to improve customer service and all claims processing performance measures. Where customers attended the enquiry counter with all the information required to process their claim, they were given assurance that their claim or change of circumstances would be processed within 2 working days.

1.13 Other measures to reduce processing times were also introduced, which included:

- where further information was required to support the change of circumstances the customer was contacted by telephone to request the information
- additional management checks to examine delays in assessing change of circumstances

1.14 To meet the remaining Claims administration enablers the council needs to:

- improve its checking processes to ensure that it is risk based and analyse the results of all management and accuracy checks across the full range of its benefits business
- develop an overpayments policy, supported by comprehensive overpayment procedures
- set performance targets for the recovery of new and old debt and monitor progress against these targets
- monitor the repayment of administrative penalties.

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 Dudley Metropolitan 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	13,500	88%	2
PM 11: Data matches resolved within 2 months	not applicable	100%	4
PM 12: Customers visited	4,500	106%	4
PM 16: Number of successful sanctions per 1,000 caseload	not applicable	4.25	4

Source: Dudley Metropolitan Borough 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 all of the 4 performance measures scored by the Department. We also reported that the council met 11 of the 21 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it met 20.

1.18 Following the BFI inspection in June 2006 the council introduced new counter-fraud policies and procedures. These included:

- a quality check to ensure that all of the information and evidence in support of the claim was available
- a fraud business plan and operational plans that supported its anti fraud policy
- a risk scoring process
- a comprehensive management checking programme to ensure compliance with legislation and the council's counter-fraud policies and procedures.

1.19 To meet the remaining Security enabler the council needs to provide annual fraud awareness refresher sessions to all staff involved directly or indirectly in the administration of HB and CTB.

User focus

1.20 Dudley Metropolitan 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	90	87	90	92	90	4
PM 18: % of appeals submitted to the Appeals Service in 4 weeks	89	100	96	82	92	4
PM 19: % of appeals submitted to the Appeals Service in 3 months	100	100	100	100	100	4

Source: Dudley Metropolitan Borough 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 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 9 of the 12 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it met 10.

1.22 To formalise and promote benefit take up the council developed its first benefit take up strategy. The strategy documented the council's commitment to ensuring Dudley residents received the correct benefit entitlement. It also stated the council's commitment to provide an accessible service, promote benefit take-up and target under claiming sections of the community.

1.23 Following the BFI inspection the council introduced service level agreements with its stakeholders.

1.24 To meet the remaining User focus enablers the council needs to:

- improve its decision letters to comply with legislation
- monitor and review its service level agreements.

Resource management

1.25 In 2006 we reported that the council met 12 of the 16 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it met 14.

1.26 Following the 2006 CPA the council developed a training strategy, supported by a detailed training plan and improved its post opening procedures.

1.27 The training strategy outlined the vital role training plays in equipping staff with the skills, knowledge and behaviour required, to ensure the delivery of council priorities currently and in the future. The training plan provided details of the development and delivery of training.

1.28 New post opening procedures were introduced to ensure that:

- the post opening supervisor was not involved in the post opening process
- arrangements were in place to record of the receipt and handover of returned benefit cheques.

1.29 To meet the remaining Resource management enablers the council needs to ensure that:

- the performance targets set include all of the statutory Performance Indicators
- its training programme covers the range of knowledge and skills needed by staff and managers involved in all of the aspects of HB and CTB administration.