



Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2007

London Borough of Hackney

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 London Borough of Hackney'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 2 of the 12 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against 5 of the 13 performance measures scored by the Department. In 2006, the council had met 59 of the 65 enablers, this year it had met 62. This resulted in the scores reflected below:

Performance Standards score	Good
Audit Commission score	3

1.4 Overall, the performance of the council had improved from "Fair" to "Good". In particular, the council had more than halved the average time taken for processing new claims, reducing it from 55 days in 2005/06, to 26 in 2006/07. Similarly, the average time taken for processing changes of circumstances had reduced from 34 days to 15, over the same period. The council had also achieved an additional enabler by introducing effective procedures for obtaining wage details from customers and their employers on starting work and prioritising these cases to minimise any potential overpayments of benefit.

1.5 The council had also improved its performance against the Security theme. Although it did not meet the interventions target set by the Department, it exceeded the visiting target and there had been an improved performance in resolving the number of data-matches within 2 months. The council had also improved its performance in one aspect of dealing with appeals and complaints and consolidated its performance in the Resource management theme. However, more work is needed to improve the time taken to submit appeals to the Appeals service, where the performance was not meeting minimum requirements.

1.6 The 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	2	3	↑
Security	2	3	↑
User focus	2	2	=
Resource management	4	4	=
Overall score	2	3	↑

Source: BFI analysis

Findings

Claims administration

1.8 The 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)	31	26	25	22	26	4
PM 2: % of new claims outstanding over 50 days	3	3	2	1	1	4
PM 3: % of new claims decided within 14 days of receiving all information	84	86	88	88	87	3
PM 4: % of rent allowance claims paid on time or within 7 days of a decision being made	73	83	92	96	86	3
PM 5: Average time for processing changes of circumstances (days)	16	15	15	13	15	3
PM 6: % of cases for which the calculation of the amount of benefit due is correct	94	94	96	95	95	1

Source: London Borough of Hackney
(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 one of the 6 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against 2 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 now met 16.

1.10 The council had made a sustained improvement in its Claims administration performance throughout 2006/07. This progress was achieved by the introduction of improved processes, better management reports and more effective performance management. The council had improved its performance in processing new claims from 31 days in the first quarter of 2006/07, to 22 days in the final quarter, resulting in an average of 26 days over the course of the year. The same trend also applied to processing changes of circumstances, which improved from 16 days in the first quarter, to 13 in the last quarter, resulting in an average of 15 over the year.

1.11 The council had achieved an additional enabler by developing procedures to obtain wage details from customers and their employers on starting work and prioritised these cases to minimise any potential overpayments of benefit. However, the council needs to improve its performance in the number of cases for which the calculation of the amount of benefit due is correct.

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 The 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	17,270	94%	3
PM 11: Data matches resolved within 2 months	not applicable	94%	4
PM 12: Customers visited	5,760	110%	4
PM 16: Number of successful sanctions per 1,000 caseload	not applicable	3.48	3

Source: London Borough of Hackney

1.14 In 2006, we reported that the council did not meet any of the 3 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against 2 of the 4 performance measures scored by the Department. We also reported that the council met 19 of the 21 enablers. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it now met 20.

1.15 Although the council did not meet its intervention target, it improved performance in dealing with data-matches sent by the Department resolving 94%, compared to 89% in 2005/06 and exceeded its annual visiting target by 10%.

1.16 The council had been unable to sift fraud referrals within an average of 10 working days of receipt due to staff shortages and an increase in the volume of work. However, it had introduced procedures to review the risk-based scoring system used to deal with fraud referrals. It had also attended regular liaison meetings and began to monitor partnership working with counter-fraud colleagues in the Department. The council had almost doubled the number of successful sanctions achieved from 67 in 2005/06 to 130 in 2006/07.

User focus

1.17 The 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	74	83	84	85	81	4
PM 18: % of appeals submitted to the Appeals Service in 4 weeks	15	41	51	46	39	1
PM 19: % of appeals submitted to the Appeals Service in 3 months	55	78	81	81	75	1

Source: London Borough of Hackney

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

1.18 In 2006, we reported that the council did not meet any of the 3 performance measures. The council's most recent self-assessment showed that it achieved a rating of excellent against one 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 now met 10.

1.19 The council made considerable improvement in the number of applications for reconsideration and revision actioned and processed within 4 weeks, increasing it from 67% in 2005/06 to 81% in 2006/07. It also achieved an additional enabler by ensuring that decisions from appeal tribunals were implemented within 4 weeks. However, there was only a marginal improvement in the number of appeals submitted to the Appeals service within 4 weeks and within 3 months. The council needs to do more work in these areas if it is to improve on its performance measure score of one.

1.20 There had been improvements in the council's front line services during 2006/07 with reduced customer waiting times, the introduction of self-service information kiosks and the provision of extra leaflets in four key languages.

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, once again, it met all 16.

1.22 The council had been active in recruiting trainee benefit assessors and senior benefit assessors to strengthen its Benefit service and had implemented a trial home working scheme to help with staff retention and provide added value for money.