

## **Benefits Inspection Action Plan**

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### **Report of Don McLure, Corporate Director Resources**

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#### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 To update Audit Committee on the status of the Benefits Inspection Action Plan (BIAP) and to set out how the performance of the Benefits Service is being monitored and managed, now and going forward.

#### **Background**

- 2 The Audit Commission's report relating to the Housing Benefit Inspection carried out in 2010 was reported to the Audit Committee in January 2011. Consideration of the report allowed the Committee to gain an understanding of the work carried out and provided the Committee with assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance arrangements in place.
- 3 A number of areas for improvement were highlighted in the report and the Committee asked for updates on progress to be provided quarterly to gain assurance that adequate progress was being made to address recommendations made.
- 4 Verbal and written updates on the benefit service have been provided at previous meetings. This reports aims to provide assurance that adequate arrangements are in place to continually monitor the effectiveness of the benefit service through a new performance management framework.

#### **Quarterly Performance Management**

- 5 In 2011/12 a new performance management framework (PMF) for the Resources service grouping was introduced. Key performance indicators and actions from the Council Plan, Service Plan and other key action plans (such as the BIAP, Investors in People Action Plan etc.) were brought into Resources' PMF arrangements.
- 6 Resources' PMF is monitored and managed quarterly through reports to Resources Management Team, discussion at individual Heads of Service performance clinics, and where appropriate, corporate reports to Corporate Management Team [CMT], Cabinet and relevant Scrutiny committees.
- 7 Through these performance management arrangements, the actions in the BIAP have been subject to significant reporting and challenge and it has become clear during 2011/12 that many of the actions are either complete or no longer reflect current circumstances.

## **Additional Performance Management**

- 8 Corporate Management Team (CMT) initiated a 'performance clinic' approach for Benefits Service performance management in the summer of 2011. Alternating comprehensive written reports and verbal updates are now presented to every fortnightly CMT. Reports focus on the implementation of the new Benefits ICT system, staffing and accommodation issues, benefits processing times (actual processing and against a forecasting model), mitigating actions to assist throughout the implementation period (such as the out-sourcing of work packages), and external communications.
- 9 Whilst the new ICT system is due to 'go live' on 6 December, it is likely that the above fortnightly performance management arrangements will continue until the end of the current financial year.

## **Continuing Performance Management**

- 10 It is now two years since the BIAP was developed and many of the actions contained therein are no longer relevant; it is therefore time to draw a line under the BIAP and to report on and manage revised actions that reflect current circumstances. Performance reporting and management for the remainder of 2011/12 will feature the current situation and challenges facing the Benefits Service and its customers.
- 11 The Altogether Better Council (ABC) priorities for the next Council Plan 2012 – 2016 have been revised and now include a new priority:
- ❖ ABC 14 - A Benefits Service that pays our customers the right amount at the right time.
- 12 Key actions to realise this ABC priority are currently being identified and will be included in the service grouping and corporate PMFs and will thereby be subject to ongoing regular reporting, management and scrutiny throughout 2012/13.

## **Recommendations**

- 13 Audit Committee is asked:
- To note the current performance arrangements for the Benefits Service
  - To agree that the Benefits Service performance management has moved on and the actions contained in the BIAP are obsolete.
  - To agree that the proposed performance management arrangements going forward are appropriate and that they will provide the Committee with assurance that identified improvements required to the benefit service will be addressed.

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