
HOUSING BENEFIT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 To consider the progress towards meeting the Housing Benefit Performance Standards (HBPS) which were adopted in June 2002.

2 PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

- 2.1 The HBPS were designed to:

- Give a comprehensive picture of what constitutes effective benefit administration, broken down into seven key functional areas.
- Be a clear strategic and operational framework for assessing the performance of each local authority.
- Be an aid to identifying local priorities for action and planning for continuous improvement.
- Improve accountability for around £14billion of public funds.
- Act as a measurement for the Best Value Review process and for Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

- 2.2 Members adopted the HBPS in June 2002 and agreed to review progress on a six-monthly basis on a June/December cycle. The first report was considered in October 2002 when Members adopted a Vision Statement and set out Policy Objectives. A Service Improvement Plan was also adopted with a first review date of June 2003. However, in June 2003 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) updated and revised the existing standards and introduced some new standards. This new set of standards changed the scoring mechanism and how standards could be achieved. It was therefore necessary to undertake a comprehensive review of those standards already met, to ensure that they were still being achieved. This delayed the first six-monthly report and Members accepted that it would take some months to cover this work. They therefore agreed to defer the first review until October 2003. The amendments had the effect of increasing the number of standards from 503 to 654.

- 2.3 On 20 October 2003 the DWP issued a Second Amendment to the Standards introducing yet further change to the original seven key functional areas and introducing certain targets. The original areas are:

- Strategic Management.
- Customer Services.
- Processing of Claims.

- Overpayments.
- Working with Landlords.
- Internal Security.
- Counter Fraud.

2.4 The high level Service Improvement Plan set out aims to fully achieve the standards over a five-year period provided resources were available.

3 SELF-ASSESSMENT

3.1 The Head of Service, Revenue and Benefit Manager and senior team members have undertaken a self-assessment against the standards to identify areas needing most attention. This assessment has been made against the June amendments (not the October second amendments).

3.2 Those areas identified as needing further input fall into the following sections:

Strategic Management	-	27 elements
Customer Services	-	3 elements
Internal Security	-	6 elements
Overpayments	-	4 elements

3.3 Members will see that the area of most concern is 'Strategic Management'.

4 COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

4.1 The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process will map the authority against the standards and an overall assessment will be given. At the time of drafting this report it is anticipated that the assessment process will take place well in advance of the CPA review; probably in December. Hopefully, Rochford should score well having adopted the Verification Framework and Standards. The areas identified for improvement in the Strategic Management Module point to the "corporate" issues surrounding Benefit administration. The Revenue and Benefit Manager is working with an external consultant to secure funding from the Performance Standards Fund to employ external assistance in producing/upgrading our policy objectives and Operational Plan. The Head of Service is hopeful of this bid succeeding and that funds will be made available for this exercise in January 2004 (from the 2003/04 funding pot).

5 SELF-ASSESSMENT MATRIX

- 5.1 The attached matrix sets out areas for attention. The index number shown refers to the individual standard. Where index numbers are missing e.g. 2.1 to 2.8, then these standards are either met or need only minor attention.
- 5.2 The Strategic Management Module is an important area within the overall framework, so it is important that these shortcomings are addressed. They can be generally summed-up as revolving around:
- Inadequate links with Corporate Policy Objectives (attention to Operational Plan).
 - Unsatisfactory links with stakeholders (this is solvable with resources).
 - More work needed in defining the roles of Members, Corporate Directors and individual officers (solvable by attending to Operational Plan/assigning resources).
- 5.3 The self-assessment matrix goes on to examine some of the other modules where weaknesses have been identified. These are linked to the wider aspects of delivering the Benefit Service. They include:
- The need to progress the delivery of Disability Discrimination Act recommendations.
 - The need to develop a Comprehensive Three-Year Plan to address shortcomings (Building Works Action Plan nearing completion).
 - Security surrounding Post Opening procedures.
 - Recruitment, retention and reward.
 - The need for an over-arching Social Inclusion Policy.
 - The need for a written Corporate Write-off Policy.

6 STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY

- 6.1 Good progress was made in the twelve months from adoption in June 2002 but this pace has slowed considerably in the last six months due to the following events:
- Merger of Revenues and Benefits team (this is a long-term project which initially slowed down development of standards because of cross-training).
 - Implementation of tax credits on 1 April 2003.

- Implementation of pension credits on 1 October 2003.
- Inability to recruit to newly created posts or fill new vacancies (the team is currently running at 60% capacity which is impacting on service delivery and restricting development of the standards).

6.2 The Council has to submit regular data to DWP to report progress towards the standards. The up-to-date position will be transmitted to the DWP at the end of November and will be reproduced visually for Members at the Meeting. The First Secretary for Work and Pensions writes to the leader of the Council, on a quarterly basis setting out Rochford's performance against the Best Value Performance Indicators and the national average. These are set out below for the first quarter of 2003/04 (latest audited statistics). Staff shortages and untrained team members means that we have been unable to maintain both speed and accuracy.

Indicator	Last Years Performance	First Quarter Performance	Quartile
Average number of calendar days to process a new claim	50	43	2 nd
Average number of calendar days to process a change of circumstances	9	16	3 rd
Percentage of renewal claims processed on time	74%	62%	3 rd
Accuracy of processing	96%	99%	Top
Percentage of new claims determined within 14 days of receipt of all information	75%	62%	3 rd
Percentage of new rent allowance claims where the first payment is made on time or within 14 days	74%	79%	Top

7 THE WAY FORWARD

- 7.1 Identified weaknesses in the Strategic Management Module and other modules are set out on the Appendix . Other areas exist, but these are generally contained in otherwise strong area. See "New claims - speed of processing" in Processing of Claims Module, for example.
- 7.2 This Appendix is supplemental to the overall action plan, which spans five years. It lists areas for improvement, identifies actions required and suggests a relatively short timescale to meet the standards. Work extends beyond the Revenue and Housing Management Team.

8 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Other than the employment of external consultancy help, for which a budget exists in 2003/04, the Council's current establishment is sufficiently resourced to meet the standards. However, continued inability to recruit to existing posts is a worry and impacts severely on progress. Corporate Management Board are currently looking at the adequacy of the existing structure in the Revenue and Benefit Section with a medium-term view to recruiting and retaining a trained and motivated workforce capable of delivering the strategic Benefit service
- 8.2 External help is anticipated for 2004/05 in order to progress the standards. The Head of Service is therefore suggesting the inclusion of £15,000 in the 2004/05 budget, part of which might be funded by DWP from the Standards Fund. A bid has been submitted to the DWP, but no certainty can be attached as to whether it will be successful. The results of the bid will be known by the end of January 2004.

9 RISK IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Optional and Information Risk

The Council needs to ensure the effectiveness of its Operational Plan to deal with peaks and troughs of work and to ensure correct information is being used to calculate benefit entitlement. It also needs to follow DWP recommendations and designate a Member as the "Benefits Champion". The Head of Service proposes that this be the Chairman of Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

9.2 Reputation Risk

Reputational damage could be sustained if the Council fail to score well in the forthcoming CPA and are seen to be slow or inaccurate in processing claims for those who number the poorest in our community.

10 RECOMMENDATION

10.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES:**

- (1) To note the progress in meeting the Standards.
- (2) To endorse identified weaknesses and the action required to meet standards.

and **RECOMMENDS** to the Policy & Finance Committee:

- (1) That a bid for £15,000 be included in the 2004/05 Draft Budget (subject to the outcome of the Standards Fund bid).
- (2) That a "Benefits Champion" be identified.

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Background Papers:

Housing Benefit Performance Standards (Amendment 2)
DWP letter 6 October 2003 (Audited Performance)

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APPENDIX 1

IDENTIFIED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT MODULE

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p><u>Policy Objectives</u></p> <p>2.9 Has the LA also set objectives:</p> <p>As interim targets where a step changes approach is required to achieve the high level objectives.</p> <p>That seek efficiency savings and value for money improvements in line with BV principles.</p> <p>Specifically to minimise backlogs.</p>	<p>These need to be linked to, and included in the operational plan.</p> <p>Employed external Consultant to advise on drafting.</p> <p>Policy and Finance Committee to identify high level objectives/targets.</p>	<p>Rochford has identified step change within the division. These are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Merger of Revenues/Benefits 2. Improve accuracy 3. Improve speed <p>Unfortunately the team are currently unable to secure both accuracy and speed due to inexperienced staff and long-term vacancies.</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>
<p>2.14 <u>Operational Plan</u></p> <p>Does the LA have a documented operational plan for HB and CTB administration.</p>	<p>Document currently being developed with help from External Consultant.</p>	<p>The operational plan section attracts high scores in assessment criteria.</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>2.15 If so does the plan take into account:</p> <p>Local aims and targets derived from the LA vision statement.</p> <p>Peaks and troughs in resource availability.</p> <p>Peaks and troughs in workload.</p> <p>Resources need to implement change.</p>	<p>Currently being developed with help from External Consultant. All issues raised in this section to be addressed within the Operational Plan</p>	<p>The operational plan section attracts high scores In assessment criteria.</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>
<p>2.16 Does the LA:</p> <p>Prioritise its objectives.</p> <p>Plan for continuous improvements.</p> <p>Plan to achieve these improvements through step changes when appropriate.</p>	<p>Will be incorporated into the Operational Plan.</p> <p>Help from External Consultant required.</p>	<p>The operational plan section attracts high scores In assessment criteria.</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>2.17 Do the plans:</p> <p>Identify key milestone dates</p> <p>Have clear lines of responsibility for progress reporting throughout.</p> <p>Have clear lines of accountability for progress reporting throughout.</p>	<p>Head of Service to demonstrate this within Operational Plan.</p> <p>Help from External Consultant required.</p>	<p>The operational plan section attracts high scores in assessment criteria.</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>
<p>2.18 Do the plans recognise the impacts on all stakeholders.</p>	<p>Head of Service to demonstrate this within Operational Plan.</p> <p>Help from External Consultant required.</p>	<p>Research amongst stakeholders will need to be undertaken. Currently there are no resources to undertake this work.</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>
<p>2.19 Are the plans communicated to all stakeholders?</p>	<p>Head of Service to identify team member with specific responsibility for this task, provide appropriate training and establish stakeholder groups.</p>	<p>Other LA's produce regular 'newsletters' – see examples in Members Library.</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>
<p>2.20 Does the LA appoint a project Manager to implement major changes.</p>	<p>Need to appoint within Division and provide project management training</p>	<p>Identification to be recorded in Section Managers Meeting minutes and included as specific project within the PDR process</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>2.21 Does the LA ensure that members and senior officers support the plans with sufficient resources to the prioritised objectives.</p>	<p>Resources to be fully identified for long-term aims. Currently using External Consultants to advise.</p> <p>All changes around Benefits to be included in budget making process and incorporated within Corporate Plan.</p>	<p>Limited member involvement identified. "Benefits Champion" to be identified by Committee. Head of Service suggests Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>
<p>2.22 Does the LA:</p> <p>Monitor progress against the operational plan?</p> <p>Report regularly on progress to members and senior officers?</p>	<p>Monitoring arrangements to be included in Operational Plan.</p>	<p>This will occur when the plan is agreed.</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>
<p>2.23 Does the LA have a documented business continuity plan?</p> <p>If Yes, does this plan state how the LA will respond to disruptions that impact on normal HB and CTB administration?</p> <p>Is the plan tested and reviewed at least annually?</p>	<p>This important document needs to be developed as a matter of urgency in conjunction with External Consultant.</p>	<p>Business continuity plan will be developed once risk management exercise completed.</p> <p>(FEBRUARY 2004)</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>Are all staff familiar with the contents of the business continuity plan, i.e. know where to find it, know who is responsible for which actions, know what their own roles are within it etc?</p>		
<p>2.28 <u>Performance Targets</u></p> <p>Has the LA set performance targets for its HB and CTB service that:</p> <p>Are SMART?</p> <p>Cover the whole range of LA's relevant policy objectives?</p> <p>Include all relevant national BVPIs?</p> <p>Provide a baseline of current performance from which progress can be measured?</p>	<p>Revenue and Benefit team to work closely with Overview and Scrutiny Committee to endorse/develop a raft of performance targets for the service.</p> <p>These should be included in the SAP emanating from the Finance Best Value review.</p>	<p>Revenues and Benefits comes within the Corporate Objectives, but does not feature specifically in the Corporate Plan other than in "Public Service Agreements" section (4) and "Quality Cost effective services".</p> <p>Head of Service regularly sets annual and three-year targets for service improvement, but these do not receive endorsement by members. National Housing Benefit BVPI's included in Corporate Plan.</p> <p>(JUNE 2004)</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>2.37 <u>Performance Monitoring</u></p> <p>Does the LA use the management information on performance to provide reports to members and interested third parties to underpin:</p> <p>The strategic vision?</p> <p>Policy Objectives?</p> <p>The documented strategic plans?</p>	<p>Revenue and Benefit team to work closely with Overview and Scrutiny Committee to endorse/enclose a raft of performance targets for the service.</p>	<p>There are problems associated with “interested third parties” as we do not have user groups. Quarterly Monitoring reports are circulated to Members and we could circulate performance information to RSLs and major landlords. We would then need to think of innovative ways of generating interest in the information.</p> <p>Once these documents are in place we could start to roll this standard out.</p> <p>(JUNE 2004)</p>
<p>2.43 Does the LA provide a HB and CTB service within which individual roles and responsibilities are:</p> <p>Clearly defined?</p> <p>Understood?</p>	<p>Service standards envisages much more specific job descriptions. Revenue and Benefit Manager to work with Human Resource Manager.</p>	<p>Initial views are that specific job descriptions are inappropriate for small authorities such as Rochford owing to the need for all staff to be capable of multi-tasking. Head of Service to work with Human Resource Manager to define ways of meeting this requirement.</p> <p>(JULY 2004)</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
2.44 Are management lines of responsibility within the service clear and logical?		Consultant identified that lines are clear below Head Of Service level but seen as very blurred at CD(FES) level because of breadth of responsibility. Some difficulty in achieving this at an authority the size of Rochford. Should appear clearer when Member Benefit Champion appointed, who will share responsibilities flowing down through Corporate Director.
2.45 Does the HB and CTB organisational structure facilitate the establishment of clear service standards for: Effective management of the service? Secure management of the service?	To be strengthened in developing the Operational Plan.	Head of Service and Revenue and Benefit Manager to work closely with External Consultant to achieve this. (JULY 2004)
2.47 Does the organisational structure provide clear lines of communication between the HB and CTB staff and the other parts of the LA organisation involved directly or indirectly with HB and CTB administration?	Some work to be undertaken in this area as currently the only Service Level Agreements in place is with the Human Resource Team. Need to have SLAs in place in all linked service areas.	Informal communication links in place, but seen as essential that SLA needs to be in place. This will be driven by all Heads of Service who have an involvement in Benefit administration. (JULY 2004)

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>2.57 <u>Management Assurance</u></p> <p>Does the LA have processes to ensure that:</p> <p>Regular management checking is undertaken, as recommended by the Audit Commission in the Benefits Manager's Handbook?</p> <p>The results of these management checks are reported regularly to senior officers and members?</p> <p>The results of the checks are fed into staff training and development plans?</p>	<p>Monitoring arrangements to be clearly identified in Operational Plan.</p>	<p>Audit Commission Handbook requires updating. Internal Audit has cut down on Audit time (Head of Service agreed in recognition of limited resources). Audit Commission recommended 30-40 days for LA's of our size-we have 15 days.</p> <p>Audit Manager agrees that if errors are identified then extra resources can be diverted to help but that generally she is satisfied that Revenues and Benefits team have robust procedures in place to prevent fraud entering the system.</p> <p>A risk assessment has been carried out and the Audit Service has been tailored to deliver.</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>2.119 <u>Race Relations Act</u> Does the LA comply with the statutory obligations of the RR(A)A by:</p> <p>Monitoring existing policies for impact on race equality?</p> <p>Assessing and consulting on the impact of proposed policies on race equality?</p> <p>Publish results of assessments, consultation and monitoring of policies?</p>	<p>Corporate Policy/Involvement Required.</p> <p>Corporate Policy Unit to develop this important area.</p>	<p>2.119 to 2.130 This is a new section and will be thoroughly inspected.</p> <p>Head of Service view is that we have much to do in this high priority area. Level 1 Race Relations Act has been achieved but work needs to be done to develop and upgrade to Race Relations (Amendment) Act standards. Inspectors will argue that low ethnicity is NOT an acceptable excuse.</p> <p>Some work started with other agencies – partnership working. Corporate Policy Officers initial work in this area to be revisited and updated..</p> <p>(DECEMBER 2004)</p>
<p>2.120 Does the LA have an RES:</p> <p>Which is actively communicated to staff?</p> <p>Which is supported by a timetabled, three-year action plan?</p>	<p>Operational Management Team to develop a Strategy and embody this into the Workforce Development Plan</p>	<p>Provision of training required through WFDP supported by PDR process</p> <p>(DECEMBER 2004)</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
2.121 Does the LA provide general training to all HB/CTB staff on their responsibilities within the RR(A)A?	As for 2.120 above	As for 1.120 above (DECEMBER 2004)
2.122 Does the LA provide cultural awareness for all staff aimed at promoting racial equality?	As for 1.120 above	As for 1.120 above (DECEMBER 2004)
2.123 Does the LA conduct an annual review of all facilities provided for claimants of key ethnic minority groups in the area?	As in 1.120 above and target BEM Groups for views	As for 1.120 above and CPU to establish consultation groups for views. (DECEMBER 2004)
2.126 Does the LA define the roles of those elsewhere in the organisation who are involved in any way with: HB administration? CTB administration?	As for 1.120 above	As for 1.120 above (DECEMBER 2004)

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>Does the LA specify the formal responsibilities of those elsewhere in the organisation who are involved in any way in:</p> <p>HB administration?</p> <p>CTB administration?</p>	To be developed as part of the WFDP	(DECEMBER 2004)
2.128 Does the LA specify the internal communications channels that are to be used between all these parties within the LA organisation?	As above	(DECEMBER 2004)
2.129 Does the LA monitor and regularly review the effectiveness of these arrangements for co-operation and liaison?	As above	(DECEMBER 2004)
2.130 If so, does the LA publish the results of the monitoring & reviews?	As above	(DECEMBER 2004)

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>3.31 <u>Accessible quality service for claimants with specific needs</u></p> <p>Has the LA:</p> <p>Assessed the standards of its service against the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Acts (DDA) 1995 and 1999, and is it taking action to meet those standards?</p> <p>Assessed all public areas in HB offices as suitable for and accessible to disabled people, following the Corporate Health Best Value Performance Indicator for authority buildings, using the terms accessible, suitable and disabled people as defined in Approved Document M of the Building Regulations 1991? Or, where offices are not accessible, ensured that claimants with restricted mobility are offered home visits?</p>	<p>Must Have Corporate approach and involvement of Members.</p> <p>Report on accommodation being presented to Policy & Finance Committee.</p> <p>Need to devise robust system to meet this requirement.</p>	<p>Head Of Service feels we would not score well on the majority of these standards.</p> <p>Council has used Approved Document M as the template for drafting the specification for the proposed new reception area.</p> <p>Council to take reasonable steps to meet its obligations in this direction by October 2004</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>Established procedures to ensure customers are provided with information in a format suitable for them as required by the DDA, for example audio cassette tape or computer disk, the suitable format continues and decision letters are sent in a format that can also be read by a third party?</p> <p>Provided text-phone facilities for people with speech and hearing difficulties?</p> <p>Made arrangements to allow a British Sign Language interview within three working days in most cases?</p> <p>The ability to provide, at short notice, information leaflets and forms in suitable formats, including large print and audiocassette?</p>	<p>Corporate approach needed to deliver a whole raft of public service information in a variety of formats to meet special needs groups</p> <p>Currently exploring “touch-tone” payment facilities within the e-Government initiative</p> <p>Corporate approach needed for front line staff. Strategic service areas working on staff instruction to be published on Council’s intranet site</p> <p>Corporate approach needed (as above).</p>	<p>We have a three-year plan to resolve failed areas.</p> <p>Only one staff member qualified. Others to be trained according to perceived demand. Another training and development issue to be addressed in the WFDP</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>A nominated person, who carries out, records and reports a check at least once a year that text phone facilitates and any Braille, audiocassette and computer disk facilitates and British Sign Language arrangements are available and working?</p> <p>Highlighted and taken action to bring the service up to standard if any deficiencies in the service compared to standard are identified as a result of checks or complaints?</p>	<p>To be included in the 2004/5 Audit Plan</p> <p>Could emanate from Audit Report which are considered by Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p>	
<p>3.34 Does the LA:</p> <p>Have any up to date written assessment of the service needs of key ethnic minority groups in their area, clearly identifying these groups or demonstrating that there are no ethnic minority groups requiring special provision in their area?</p>	<p>Development of existing communication strategy and media strategy needed.</p>	<p>Head Of Service feels some work to be done in many of these areas.</p> <p>Just recently a "Language Identifier" notice has been placed in reception from the Refugee Council this signposts reception staff to contact Language Line who can provide telephone translation service.</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>Provide, when applicable, key HB/CTB information leaflets and claim forms in Welsh in Wales, and in written languages of key ethnic minority communities in the local authority area?</p> <p>Have effective arrangements to secure an interpreter within 3 working days or access a telephone interpreting service immediately, for claimants who need an interpreter and cannot readily provide an adult interpreter themselves for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all key spoken languages of ethnic minority communities in the local authority area? - other languages? 		<p>Work being undertaken jointly with the Essex Race Relations Group. Essex Police taking the lead. Further work around cohesive communities and how this affects the Rochford District being commissioned.</p> <p>Many ethnic minority groups relate more to “out of District” facilities</p>

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
Have a nominated person who carries out, records and reports a check at least once a year that interpreting services the authority aims to offer are available, can be contacted and interviews arranged within time targets, and that a telephone interpreting service is available at short notice for a range of languages?	To be undertaken by Audit Team as part of 2004/5 Audit Plan	
Highlight and take action to bring the service up to standard if deficiencies in the service compared to standard are identified as a result of checks or complaints?	As above	(OCTOBER 2004)
<p>3.38 <u>Accessible quality service for those who work</u></p> <p>Has the LA assessed the service needs of its in-work claimants? If yes:</p> <p>Does the LA provide a service that it considers meets the needs identified by this assessment?</p>	Survey of in work claimants needed.	<p>As a minimum the Council ought to undertake a survey to assess demand of out of hours contact Question on this topic to be included in the next Housing Benefit Service Standards Survey.</p> <p>(OCTOBER 2004)</p>

OVERPAYMENTS	ACTION REQUIRED	COMMENT/TIMESCALE
<p>8.4 <u>Policies and Procedures</u></p> <p>Does the LA have a debt recovery strategy?</p>	<p>Members To Agree A Policy.</p>	<p>Social Inclusion Policy awaited. We do have a draft Corporate Debt Strategy (policy). Research into using Salisbury District Council model.</p>
<p>8.43 <u>Management of Debt</u></p> <p>Does the LA only consider writing off debts when all avenues of recovery have been exhausted, or where it would be uneconomic in line with corporate write-off policies?</p>		<p>Procedures for write off requires ultimate decision to be made by CD(F&ES). However, no written policy in being as yet. This needs to be incorporated into the Draft Corporate Debt Strategy. We do this but there is no evidence held.</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>
<p>8.44 Does the LA ensure that the write-off policy is in line with any other relevant Council policy and Standing Orders?</p>		<p>All writing off of debt is centralised in that CD(F&ES) required to authorised. Also Member involvement with significant amounts in Constitution. Currently there is no written policy to evidence the decision making process</p> <p>(APRIL 2004)</p>

8.47	Does the LA set targets for reducing the numbers and amounts of inactive debt?	Members and officers to establish achievable targets	Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider report from Head of Service setting achievable targets (JUNE 2004)
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