

## Agenda Item:

**Report to:** Resources Overview and Scrutiny

**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> December 2006

**Report from:** Chief Auditor, Audit & Investigations

**Title of report:** **BFI ACTION PLAN - UPDATE**

**Purpose of report:** To advise progress made on the BFI Action Plan

**Recommendations:** That the report be noted

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In January 2005, the Government announced a programme of inspections designed to target specific areas of benefits administration and counter-fraud activity where there were concerns about performance. Hastings Borough Council was selected for a Security focused inspection because the performance data it had submitted to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) showed that it made limited use of sanctions and prosecutions against fraudsters and it was in the bottom quartile of reported performance nationally.
- 1.2 The inspection took place during November 2005 and a full copy of the BFI Inspection Report issued in February 2006 is available at <http://www.bfi.gov.uk/reports/2006/bfi/hastings/> .
- 1.3 It was reported in to Cabinet on 27 March 2006 where it was agreed that the Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee would monitor the action plan.
- 1.4 The report made; 10 high priority recommendations and 8 medium priority recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Council. It was also critical that 12 of 14 recommendations made in their 2001 report had not been implemented.

- 1.5 A copy of the full BFI action plan including commentary is attached at appendix A.
- 1.6 The Council was referred to the DWP Monitoring Team and had to each month, submit performance information for their review.

## 2 Current Status

- 2.1 The DWP Monitoring Team visited the Council twice; once in June and again during November 2006 and said that they had been very pleased in the way that their 2006 report had been received and particularly the speed with which Housing Benefits and Audit & Investigations had implemented their recommendations.
- 2.2 Following the meeting, there are just 2 outstanding recommendations with a target date of 31 March 2007. These are:

Rec.	Action	Officer	Comment
5 f	Address any inconsistencies between policy and operational practices	Chief Auditor	In progress
15	Produce a business continuity plan to manage all risks to the benefits service	General Manager, Revenues	In-hand at a corporate level

- 2.3 The DWP have informed the Council that they will be writing to the Chief Executive in January 2007 confirming their satisfactory opinion. They are very happy with our progress and do not intend to monitor us further.

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