

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
5 OCTOBER 2010**

HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFITS SERVICE INSPECTION REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the report resulting from the inspection of the Council's Housing and Council Tax Benefits Service by the Audit Commission in September 2010. The inspection report is attached for the Panel's consideration.

2 SUGGESTED ACTION

- 2.1 **That the attached inspection report of the Council's Housing and Council Tax Benefits Service be considered by the Panel.**

3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Audit Commission inspection of the Benefits Service took place in May this year and the related report is attached. Following submission of a self-assessment the Service was inspected over a week including interviews with the Executive Member for Finance, Resources and Assets, Councillor Ward, the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing, Councillor Dale Birch, the Chairman of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Finnie, and the Chairman of the Housing and Council Tax Benefits Working Group, Councillor Finch.
- 3.2 Members may remember from the reports to the Panel that the Audit Commission inspection regime was a harder test than the previous Comprehensive Performance Assessment model. Thus over the last year a benefit improvement plan has been in place steered by the Housing and Council Tax Benefits Working Group.
- 3.3 The Audit Commission inspection is a snapshot of our on going journey towards the delivery of an excellent Benefits Service. Therefore, it is gratifying that they have recognised the improvements that have been made recently and that our prospects for improving still further are promising. The recommendations from the inspection cover work that is already in hand or planned and again it is reassuring that the Audit Commission has confirmed the Service is heading in the right direction.
- 3.4 Four of the six Benefits Services in Berkshire have now been inspected. Windsor and Maidenhead was inspected in November 2008 and achieved fair with uncertain prospects for improvement. Slough was inspected in May 2010 and achieved a poor rating with promising prospects for improvement and West Berkshire achieved fair with uncertain prospects for improvement in May 2010. The Bracknell Forest score is the best score achieved in Berkshire to date.
- 3.5 A response to the Inspection report and the recommendations will be reported to the November meeting of the Executive.

Background Papers

None.

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