

Case study

Client: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Project: Review of Inspection, Monitoring and Support

Dates: March-December 2004

Carried out by: Peter Hyde

Requirement

DWP has overall responsibility for Housing Benefit, which is administered by 408 separate Local Authorities. It has long been trying to bring about an improvement in performance in the administration of the Benefit and especially to reduce the variability in performance. A wide range of interventions was in use (e.g. monitoring performance, financial incentives and grants, inspection, consultancy support and Ministerial direction). These were administered by two policy divisions and by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate. DWP was concerned that the work of the three units was not as well coordinated as it might be and that the totality of interventions was not producing the maximum possible impact. Peter Hyde Management Consulting was commissioned to undertake a review, and later to provide support to implementation of its findings.

What we did

We worked with a project team involving people from the three units to collect data, map processes and understand the issues. Close consultation was undertaken with local authority representatives through their Associations.

The review concluded that the current arrangements were collectively producing an improvement in LA administration of Housing Benefit. However, the set of activities which together make up inspection, monitoring and support form a single overall process but were not very well integrated, contained elements of duplication and were not managed as a coherent strategy for improvement.

The review recommended a more integrated approach which would be less burdensome overall for LAs, would involve activity proportionate to risk and be outcome- and customer-driven. It would also provide scope for headcount reductions.

Outcomes

The report was accepted and we were asked to support its implementation. Much has already been done, but some aspects were overtaken by the decision to reorganise government inspectorates and merge BFI into the Audit Commission.