

THE FINANCE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE / COMMENTS AND ACTION PLAN

The benefits service's senior management accepts the WAO's findings and considers their conclusions to be fair.

Regarding the WAO's four proposals for improving the service -

Are the Council's arrangements for delivering its Housing and Council Tax Benefit Services likely to lead to improvement?	Gwynedd Council's Response
P1 Ensure that effective succession planning arrangements are in place for the Quality Assurance and Training Officer (QA and T Officer) post.	Due to the Westminster Government's Welfare Reform legislation, retention and recruitment of suitable staff will be a growing challenge for the service, but appropriate measures will be implemented regarding key posts.
P2 Ensure that all staff are aware of business continuity arrangements contained in the disaster recovery plan.	Agreed and action planned.
P3 Ensure that the transfer of the delivery of take-up activities from the Council to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) does not impact negatively on citizen engagement.	The CAB have appointed a benefits promotion officer with the WG money transferred to them, and this officer is already in contact with the Council's benefits officers, establishing protocols for referring cases, etc.
P4 Consider introducing a process of consultation or survey to evaluate the customer's view about the service.	The Council strongly supports the general principle of consulting customers. However, we do not consider it timely to do this so close to the most radical national changes ever to the benefits service (cutting the level of rent allowance, introducing local support for council tax scheme, and migration of the Council's housing benefit claims to the DWP's own Universal Credit regime).