



Report to Cabinet

Subject: Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)
Corporate Assessment Final Report

Date: 4 December 2008

Author: Chief Executive

1. Purpose of the Report

- To inform members of the Audit Commission's final report on its CPA Corporate Assessment of the Borough Council carried out in July 2008.
- To set out the Council's response to the Areas for Improvement set out by the Commission in its report, including any links to Areas for Improvement identified in the Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeA) Peer Review report on the Council published in Spring 2008.

2. Background

The Council sought CPA corporate reassessment in 2007 and was accepted onto the programme for 2008.

To prepare for CPA, the Council asked IDeA to carry out a Peer Review assessment, using CPA key lines of enquiry. That assessment took place in March 2008. It identified a number of areas for improvement, both short-term to support the CPA inspection and longer-term.

The CPA inspection took place in July 2008. The Audit Commission published its final report on 11 November 2008.

It was agreed in May 2008 that any Improvement Programme required would be developed after both the IDeA and Audit Commission reports had been received, so that any themes arising in both reports could be addressed in a joined-up way.

3. CPA Final Report

A copy of the Audit Commission's final report is attached at **Appendix A**.

The Council was assessed as "good". This is the same level as when the Council was first assessed in 2003, though members should note that the 2008 assessment was against the Commission's "harder test", which includes tougher standards than those in place in 2003.

The 2008 report praises the Council for its good quality services and effective partnership working, and adds that residents' satisfaction levels with services are both good and improving. The Council is also praised for its priorities for improvement, which the report states are based on an understanding of residents' needs.

Areas for improvement identified can be summarised as covering: -

- A strategic approach to equality and diversity
- Improvements to performance management
- Member development.

There is close correlation between the areas for improvement identified here and the key longer term areas for improvement identified in the Peer Review.

4. Improvement Planning

None of the areas for improvement (AFIs) identified in either review came as a surprise – the Council was already aware of them and had reflected them to some extent in its service planning for 2008/09 and beyond.

In some instances, progress has been delayed by the need to prioritise other actions, in particular work associated with Housing Stock Transfer and the process of supporting CPA itself. Now that these have both been substantially cleared, opportunity has been taken to bring work against these AFIs back to the fore.

A summary of actions planned or in progress against each AFI theme is set out below. It is suggested that progress towards all three continues to be managed through corporate performance management arrangements, and that improvement actions are incorporated in departmental and service plans.

4.1 - Equality and Diversity – In August 2008, the Council made a commitment to reach Level 3 against the Equality Standard in by March 2011. This upgrades the previous commitment agreed in the 2008/09 Budget/Service Plan to reach Level 2 by March 2009.

The Corporate Equalities Group is now developing detailed plans to deliver this commitment. Early actions completed include updated training in Equalities Impact Assessments delivered to all managers, a key building block for a more systematic approach to equality and diversity in service delivery. Equality and diversity will also be reflected more specifically in new service planning arrangements now being developed.

4.2 – Performance Management – The Council had already made a commitment to introduce a new performance management system this year. Progress on this was delayed by the need to prepare for CPA but is now back on track, with a target implementation date of April 2009 for performance indicator information. This will address the issues around more focused performance information and presentation of performance information. It will also support progress on member engagement in performance management.

Outcome based measures against many agreed strategic outcomes were adopted by the Council in August 2008. These now need to be progressed further and linked explicitly to the new Sustainable Community Strategy, in turn feeding into the new performance management system. These issues are being addressed through a new approach to service planning currently being developed, which will inform the 2009/10 Budget/Service Plan and should be in place fully during 2009.

4.3 – Member development – A project to devise and implement a training and capacity building programme for members was included in the 2007/08 Budget/Service Plan and has been carried forward for further development in 2008/09, with a target completion date of March 2009.

Progress has clearly been made – the CPA self-assessment included a number of examples of good practice - but the observations of both CPA and the Peer Review suggest that the external view is that further progress is still required. Members will need to consider the extent to which they wish to take these comments on board and either amend or develop the member training/development scheme further.

5. Resource Implications

Members will be aware of the difficult economic conditions and the effect this is having on the Council's finances. This is likely to make it difficult to allocate additional resource to address the areas for improvement identified, with the

result that all are likely to need to be addressed substantially from within existing agreed resources. This may impact on the speed with which each is addressed.

However, in many cases, the AFIs are as much about changing the way the Council works as much as doing more, with the proviso that, in some instances, some up front investment (for example, in training provision) may help facilitate such change.

In the case of performance management, funding for the new system has been agreed and, once it is introduced, it should be no more resource intensive than current operating arrangements, while producing better quality information.

6. Recommendations

Members are **recommended**: -

- To note the report
- To support the integration of improvement planning against the three improvement themes identified within corporate performance management arrangements
- To refer the final Audit Commission report to Audit Sub-Committee for information.