

COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FROM 2005

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET

13TH JANUARY, 2005

Wards Affected

None

Purpose

To advise Cabinet of receipt of the provisional timetable for joint area reviews and Corporate Assessment dated 21st December 2004 but received on the 24th December 2004, indicating that Herefordshire was included in the provisional timetable for the period September – December 2005. A copy of the provisional timetable is attached for information as appendix 1.

Key Decision.

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation

THAT the Cabinet

- (a) notes the publication of the provisional timetable**
- (b) approves the arrangements for supporting the process**
- (c) gives consideration to the merits or otherwise of some form of external peer review and give authority to the Chief Executive to pursue the options for such a review.**

Reasons

The experience of the first round of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment established the importance of appropriate preparation and in particular the importance of an effective and accurate self-assessment. The provisional timetable with the anticipated inclusion of Herefordshire in the first block of authorities to be inspected places a premium on prompt preparation.

Considerations

1. The changes in the proposed approach to the Comprehensive Performance Assessments have been well heralded and a paper entitled "Proposals for Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2005" was published on the 9th December. There is an opportunity to respond to the consultation and the closing

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Neil Pringle, Chief Executive, on Hereford 260044

date for that consultation is the 18th February 2005. It is important that the council should respond and that will be the subject of a separate report

2. It is difficult to summarise what are in practice quite significant changes in the approach. The proposed new approach will be similar in many respects to the current CPA in that:

- There will be a Corporate Assessment;
- Individual service blocks will be updated annually, with some services being accorded greater weight than others;
- There will be a use of resources judgement which will also be updated annually; and
- These three elements will be brought together in an overall assessment updated annually and summarised by assigning each local authority to a category bearing a simple description.

3. The consultation document summarises the main changes in the following way –

a) The Corporate Assessment - this will become more challenging in that it will –

- Include an explicit judgement of the quality and impact of the Council's efforts to promote user focus and diversity;
- Assess how well the Council contributes to the achievement of shared priorities between local and central government while understanding and meeting the needs of its local community;
- Include within the key lines of enquiry more explicit consideration of management of resources and value for money and reaching judgements about capacity; and
- Assess the performance of the Council in leading and influencing communities, local partnerships and other local agencies, with a focus on what difference Councils are making to local places and people.

b) Service Blocks - these will be revised and their content improved by:

- bringing together services for children and young people into a single service block reflecting the focus of The Children Act;
- removing dependence on inspection of individual services permitting a further reduction in the overall level of inspection and making better use of other available information about the performance of local authority services; and
- taking account of consultation with government departments about appropriate performance indicators and other information for use in the CPA

c) Use of Resources - there will be a more rigorous assessment than previously. It will

- include an explicit judgement on value for money;
- provide the opportunity for Council to show, through their annual efficiency statement that they are delivering the efficiency gains required under the

efficiency review.

- d) Overall Assessment – there will be a simpler but more robust and informative approach to bringing together the various elements of CPA into an overall assessment and categorisation
- Within each category authorities will be more clearly distinguished from each other by the introduction of a “Direction of Travel Statement”;
 - To ensure that authorities attach importance to improving services across the board, the overall CPA categories will be determined by the use of rules rather than the addition of scores.
4. Finally in making these changes the Audit Commission make it clear that
- CPA beyond 2005 will be a more demanding test, but the overall burden of regulation will reduce as there will be less service inspection;
 - The Commission remains committed to continuous improvements so key lines of enquiry will develop over time;
 - Precise comparisons between the old and the new system will be difficult and there will inevitably be movements between categories both up and down.
5. It is not possible or necessary to cover all the aspects of what is a relatively complex consultation document in this relatively short report. It is however important to emphasise the significance of the Joint Area Reviews of Children’s Services which will now be undertaken in conjunction with the Corporate Assessment itself. That does have implications for the pace at which the Council addresses some of the structural issues necessary to complete the initial step it took in making the appointment of interim Director of Children’s Services.

The Corporate Assessment Report will set out a conclusion on each of the following main themes:

- Ambition for the Community;
- Prioritisation;
- Capacity;
- Performance Management;
- Achievement

In addition, however, the Executive Summary will include clear statements for every Council on Community Leadership, political and managerial leadership, user focus and diversity, as well as value for money. The understanding is that political leadership will be address in terms of the Council as a whole and not simply the leadership of the administration (where an administration is formed) and will therefore deal with some of the areas which have traditionally been the province of corporate governance reports.

It is suggested that the Chief Executive addresses some of these issues in greater detail with political group leaders.

6. As has previously been stated in this report only an outline of the assessment process is given and there will be further opportunities commencing with the seminar on the 17th January to give further information to members on the process.

Preparation

7. As with the last Comprehensive Performance Assessment it is important to adequately resource the process. That does involve shifting the focus of the work of some key postholders. As might be anticipated, overall managerial responsibility must lie with the Chief Executive. The formula employed for the 2002 inspection was to give the coordinating role to the Director of Policy and Community who was then able to utilise the resources of the existing Policy team. The appointment since 2002 of the Head of Performance Management has created another key resource which needs to be similarly coordinated. The contemporaneous joint area review of services for children and the stated intention to integrate the management of the two services places a greater importance on that coordinating role. The Chief Executive will develop more fully at the meeting how that coordination might best be achieved.
8. There will also be a particular need for coordination of the inspection of the political and managerial leadership and the Chief Executive will need to liaise in particular with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Strategic Monitoring Committee as well as with the political group leaders.
9. Prior to the last Comprehensive Performance Assessment the Council had had the benefit of an IdEA peer review and the subsequent EFQM Assessment. That was able to inform the inspection process and assist in particular with the preparation of the self-assessment and for the review on site. If the Herefordshire inspection was to be early in the period September-December then the time available for a full IdEA peer review is potentially very limited. It is not yet clear when the Council will receive notification of the likely dates of inspection. There are, however, other forms of external review available to the Council and the Chief Executive will wish to describe at the meeting both the preferences and the different styles of review which might be available to the Council to assist the process.
10. It is important in the context of the self assessment to record the fact that under the recently published 2004 assessment the Council remains a good performing authority and but for the unexpected fall back in performance within the Social Care star ratings, would have had a service score which would enable it to aspire to excellent. The description which accompanied the 2004 Statement stated that "Based on its current plans Herefordshire is well placed to continue to improve the services it provides to local people". That is not to be complacent but simply to give the factual basis on which the Council goes forward to an early review under the revised comprehensive performance assessment in 2005.

Alternative Options

There are no alternative options which are applicable because the Council's position in the inspection timetable is determined by the Audit Commission.

Risk Management

There are clear risks to the reputation of the Council. The Commission are consulting on reducing the number of overall categories from 5 to 4 thus categorising authorities as

excellent, good, fair and establishing a new category effectively merging those currently described as “weak” and “poor”.