

COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT: CORPORATE ASSESSMENT AND JOINT AREA REVIEW

Report By: Chief Executive

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To report formally to Strategic Monitoring Committee on the receipt of the Corporate Assessment and Joint Area Review undertaken earlier this year and to advise the Committee on the timetable for addressing the Improvement Plan.

Financial Implications

2. Any financial implications will be addressed through the improvement planning process.

Risk Management

3. If the Improvement Plan is not addressed then there is a continuing risk to the Council's reputation and, although the overall assessment of the delivery of service is positive, there are risk areas if the Improvement Plan is not robust.

Background

4. Although invitations were extended both to Cabinet and to Strategic Monitoring Committee and the opportunity was, therefore, given to attend the feedback sessions in relation to the Corporate Assessment and the Joint Area Review it is important that arrangements are made for those assessments to be formally received by Strategic Monitoring Committee and that the relevant individual Scrutiny Committee(s) have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Improvement Plan process.

Considerations

5. It is worth recording that the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process was revised this year and Herefordshire Council was one of the first eight authorities to experience the new process of assessment which involved a Corporate Assessment and a Joint Area Review which were carried out at the same time. Those two assessments along with continuing service assessments then feed into the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, the outcome of which was announced in December. The new Comprehensive Performance Assessment also contains a new assessment on Direction of Travel which is expressed in terms of the capacity of the organisation to improve.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from N.M. Pringle, Chief Executive,
on 01432 260044

6. The Corporate Assessment and Joint Area Review are not re-issued. Most Members will already have received copies and copies of both documents have been available on the Intranet since they were published in December. If any Member wishes to have a hard copy then they are invited to contact Committee Services prior to the meeting.
7. The Chief Executive wrote to all Members of the Council on 7th December, 2005 to explain the outcome for the Council as a whole continued to be a positive one and when the Comprehensive Performance ratings were made public on Monday, 12th December the Council's overall score was that of a three star authority and under the new Direction of Travel statement, the authority was seen as "Improving Adequately".
8. Similarly, in overall terms there was a positive assessment of the review of Services for Children and Young People where the summary report commenced with the statement that "outcomes for most young people in Herefordshire are good overall". As the Chief Executive indicated, however, in his earlier letter to all Members in December there was a major qualification to that overall assessment and that was in relation to the important area of "Staying Safe" where the inspection had concluded that the arrangements for that area were "inadequate". Despite the strong showing in the other areas of the assessment, inevitably the Council must give immediate and direct responses to improvement in that area.
9. Alongside those assessments, the Council continued to receive reports through the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter received in December which, in turn, outlines areas where action is needed on the part of the Council which need to contribute to the Improvement Plan.
10. The Council continues to receive an assessment in relation to Use of Resources and also this year for the first time receives a specific assessment in relation to Value for Money. On both judgements, the authority scores a 3 on a scale which again ranges from 1 to 4. In the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter it is concluded

"We considered both the Council's achievement of Value for Money and the arrangements to manage and improve Value for Money. Overall we concluded that both good achievements and good arrangements are demonstrated. The Council has a low comparative spend and a good performance as assessed by external regulators."
11. Finally, the Council is also assessed under the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) star rating in relation to Adults and the authority is seen as Serving Some People Well with Uncertain Prospects for Improvement whilst in relation to children the impact of the "Staying Safe" judgement within the Joint Area Review has led to an assessment that the authority is Serving No Children Well with Poor Prospects for Improvement. As is spelt out earlier in this report, these are issues where the authority's response must be immediate and direct. This will form an important part of any improvement programme.

Improvement Planning

12. The improvement planning has already commenced and will build on the improvement actions outlined in the Corporate Assessment, the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and the Joint Area Review report. Meetings have been arranged with the CSCI Regional Director and with the Chief Inspector of CSCI early in the new year. It is also anticipated that there will be early meetings with the Audit

Commission and our External Auditors in the new year to develop the Improvement Plan emanating from the Corporate Assessment.

13. In a sense the Improvement Plan is more important to the Council than receipt of the reports and it is important that the Council invests in the planning of this process. Further reports will be brought to Cabinet and to Strategic Monitoring Committee following the meetings referred to and as a comprehensive Improvement Plan is developed.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None