

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Corporate Governance Committee 23 December 2009
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COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT (CAA) ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT – 2008/2009 OUTCOME AND NEXT STEPS

Purpose

1. This report sets out the findings of the Organisational Assessment for South Cambridgeshire District Council for 2008-09, which was released by the Audit Commission on 9 December 2009. It draws attention to the report's key findings and outlines next steps in terms of responding to the current assessment and preparing for future assessments.
2. The report is for information, although the Committee's views on the outcome of the assessment and proposed next steps will be welcomed in informing the Council's response.

Background and context

3. The CAA looks at how well public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. Its predecessor, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), provided a single assessment of local authorities' performance, ranking each council on a scale from 'poor' to 'excellent'. The revised framework comprises both organisational and area assessments. The organisational assessment comprises the Council's Use of Resources assessment, which the Committee received at its last meeting, and an assessment for Managing Performance. The Audit Commission's report brings these assessments together into an overall Organisational Assessment of the Council. The revised assessment ranks local authorities on a scale from 1-4, a ranking of 1 indicating that an authority is performing poorly, up to a 4, indicating that it is performing excellently.

Considerations – Headline results

4. The Council achieved an overall score of 2 out of 4, indicating that it is performing adequately. The full report, published by the Audit Commission, is **attached** as Appendix A; however, the Executive Summary from pages 2-3 of the report is reproduced below in order to provide an overview of the headline results:

'Overall South Cambridgeshire District Council performs adequately. It is improving in many areas that matter to local people. Satisfaction with services is generally good and ease of access to services is slowly improving. High numbers of houses that local people can afford have been built. The Council works well with partners. The skills and abilities of staff are improving through training but the Council does not have a clear picture about the number of staff and skills needed for the future. Key vacancies have affected achievement during 2008/09. Progress in making sure all people are treated fairly has been slow. Resident satisfaction with the way the Council runs things is average. Council finances are

okay at the moment but by relying on its reserves it will have to make more difficult decisions in the future such as reducing some of its services.

South Cambridgeshire District Council scores 2 out of 4 for managing its performance. It is improving in many areas that matter to local people. It performs well on waste and recycling, council tax collection and paying housing benefits. The streets are clean and satisfaction with services is generally good. High numbers of houses that local people can afford have been built. But, it is slower at working out planning applications. Crime levels are low compared to other areas but burglary and car crime has increased.

The Council works well with partners to plan for housing development but progress has slowed down because of the recession. Progress on economic development is slow, but £150,000 is being used to help local businesses through the recession.

Access to services is improving slowly. The Contact Centre is good. Complaints are dealt with more quickly, but satisfaction with complaints handling remains low. Progress in making sure all people are treated fairly has been slow.

Council leaders are clear about what they need to achieve and are now better able to deliver. They have set five aims for 2009/10 which are linked to those of other public and private sector partners. More training is provided for councillors. Scrutiny Committee has improved, contributing to better decision making. Most planned improvements have been achieved. But, some have not because some targets have been unrealistic. The skills and abilities of staff are improving through training but workforce planning is not fully developed.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for its use of resources. Council finances are sound for the short term. Efficiency savings have been made. However, there is a gap in the budget between spending and income which will need to be dealt with. The recession has reduced income. Future levels of service for housing tenants are uncertain but the Council is considering the best way forward.'

Considerations – Next steps

5. An effective response to this assessment is vital to enable the Council to build on the areas of strength identified, address areas for improvement and demonstrate continuous improvement in advance of future assessments.
6. Work is already underway to identify key actions required in response to the Use of Resources assessment. These actions will be combined with actions in response to the Managing Performance element to create a comprehensive Improvement Plan for the Council.
7. In order to build on this assessment, it will also be necessary to ensure that the authority is prepared for future CAA assessments. It is proposed to develop a CAA Framework for South Cambridgeshire District Council based on a comprehensive self assessment process, supported by a detailed evidence base.
8. A draft CAA Framework will be submitted to the Senior Management Team for consideration in January 2010 and will be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee for consideration. Work to put in place and implement the approved framework, including links with major corporate projects which are planned or

ongoing, will be reflected in final service plans for 2010-2013 and the Council's Corporate Plan for 2010-2011.

Implications

9. Financial	No direct implications arising from this information report.
Legal	No direct implications arising from this information report.
Staffing	No direct implications arising from this information report.
Risk Management	No direct implications arising from this information report.
Equal Opportunities	No direct implications arising from this information report.

Effect on Strategic Aims

10. The Committee will note that the assessment report is structured around the Council's performance in meeting its strategic objectives for 2008-2009 and it is anticipated that future assessments will follow the same pattern. There are no direct impacts on the Council's current strategic aims arising from this information report; however, it is clear that the subsequent agreement and successful implementation of a robust inspection framework will be necessary to ensure that the Council is able to target future services towards the achievement of its key objectives for the community.

Conclusions/Summary

11. The assessment is considered to be a fair reflection of the Council's current position. It provides a constructive basis from which to continue the Council's improvement journey and the opportunity to develop a response framework which enables these improvements to be carried out.

Recommendations

12. It is recommended that the outcome of the Council's Organisational Assessment, set out in the report **attached** as Appendix A, be received and noted, along with the next steps to be undertaken in response to current and future assessments, set out in paragraph five above.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Organisation Assessment (Appendix A **attached**)

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