
ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report introduces the Annual Audit and Inspection report, produced by the Audit Commission, for Members' consideration and discussion. A copy of the report is being despatched to all Members under separate cover. Please bring your copy to this meeting.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Under revised procedures, the Audit Commission, through the auspices of the Council's Relationship Manager, Mr Ian Davidson, working with and incorporating the comments from the Council's external auditors, PKF, has now produced an assessment report on the Council performance over the past year. The Annual Audit and Inspection letter relates to the work the Council has undertaken primarily through out the past year.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The report draws on the findings and conclusions from the audit of the Council for 2005/06 and from any inspections that have been undertaken in the last year. The letter includes a review of how well the Council has progressed (Direction of Travel report) and the external auditor's assessment of how well the Council has managed its finances (the Use of Resources scores). These latter components are an important feed into any future decision regarding the potential for a rescoring the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) category.
- 3.2 The report is addressed particularly to Councillors, but is also available as a public document for stakeholders, including members of the community served by the Council.
- 3.3 The main messages for the Council included in the report are:-
1. Rochford District Council is putting in place the necessary building blocks to improve services. Performance is mixed but there is improvement in some key services. Some key front line services are improving, such as the Benefit service which is now more accessible and claims are processed more quickly and accurately. An effective partnership to deliver leisure services is already resulting in improvements to local people with usage of facilities increasing well. The impact of investment in other key services such as development control and environmental services has yet to be fully realised.
 2. The Council does not have a clear vision for the district or how it links to wider agendas such as the Thames Gateway Project. Divisional plans are being developed for the first time and performance management arrangements, although improving, have yet to be embedded. Capacity is improving. Internally, a focus on human

resource management and the implementation of a restructure is improving focus and efficiency. In addition, the benefits of partnership working are also improving capacity although some aspects of delivery by partners need to be more robustly managed. The Council faces some significant issues not least those arising from the vote by tenants in support of a transfer of the housing stock to a Housing Association Partner and the delivery of efficiency savings.

- 3.4 The key messages arising out of the report are that the Council needs to focus its activities over the coming year on the following four main strands:-
- Development of a clearer vision for the district, which is underpinned by measurable priorities
 - Consolidate and continue to develop its focus around performance management to sustain service improvement
 - Develop arrangements for value for money including cost to performance analysis and effectively benchmarking
 - Further develop its approach to diversity, consultation and engagement with marginalised and vulnerable groups
- 3.5 Mr David Eagles, from the Council's external auditors, will be in attendance at Committee to discuss the report.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Clearly the report is important in terms of the reputation of the Council. It presents an outsiders' view as to how well the Council is addressing matters raised in the 2004 CPA Assessment and the Government's overall agenda in terms of the modernisation and improvement of Local Government.
- 4.2 The report will be key too, in any Council submission to be re-assessed under the CPA and be recategorised.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
- (1) to note the content of the report and the four areas highlighted for further focus by the Council throughout 2007.
 - (2) to receive quarterly reports on progress against each of these four areas, to ensure effective implementation of the issues to be addressed.

Paul Warren
Chief Executive

Background Papers:-

None

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If you would like this report in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.