

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET - 15 SEPTEMBER 2008

CORPORATE ASSESSMENT REPORT

REPORT BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet the Audit Commission's Corporate Assessment Report for Telford & Wrekin Council and initial proposals to further develop our approach to delivering continuous improvement.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet:

- **notes the Corporate Assessment Report and scores;**
- **endorse the proposal to develop the Council's organisational improvement agenda.**

3 TELFORD & WREKIN CORPORATE ASSESSMENT

- 3.1 In May 2008, the Council underwent a Corporate Assessment by the Audit Commission. This rigorous Assessment forms a core part of the Commission's annual Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of the Council. We are currently rated 4 stars or "excellent" for CPA.
- 3.2 The Corporate Assessment looked at all aspects of how the Council is managed, the quality of services it delivers and the value-for-money it provides for local people. It involved an intense fortnight of interviews and workshops with Members, officers, partners and residents. The Assessment focused on 5 themes:
- **Ambition** – does the Council and its partners have a clear vision for what it is trying to achieve?
 - **Prioritisation** – is the Council focused on delivering its vision?
 - **Capacity** – has the Council got the resources (money, people) to deliver its Vision?
 - **Performance Management** – is the Council effectively tracking and driving progress to deliver this Vision?
 - **Achievements** – is the Council delivering this Vision?
- 3.3 We have now received the Audit Commission's Assessment Report. Overall, the Commission awarded the Council a "4" – the highest possible mark. Only 15 other comparable local authorities have received

this top mark to date. This result also means the Council is well placed to retain its CPA “excellent” rating for 2008. This will mean that the Council will continue to be subject to a “lighter touch” external audit and inspection regime with the associated reduction in fees. A copy of the Report’s executive summary is presented in Appendix One with the full Report available on the intranet at <http://intranet/sites/PolicyPerformancePartnerships/Pages/CorporateAssessment.aspx>

Summary of Assessment Scores	
Ambition	4
Prioritisation	4
Capacity	3
Performance management	3
Achievement	3
Overall	4

- 3.4 Of the 5 Assessment themes, we scored top marks (“4”) and were described as “performing strongly” for Ambition and Prioritisation. The Report states that “The Council and its partners have developed clear and challenging ambitions to transform the borough so that residents can enjoy better quality of life. This long term strategic vision is underpinned by a set of inter-connecting short and medium term strategies.” and, importantly, that our ambitions are translated into “clear and robust priorities” which are “firmly based on a sound understanding of the needs and views of local people”. These priorities “are fully integrated into the Council’s financial and performance frameworks”.
- 3.5 For the Assessment Themes of Capacity, Performance Management and Achievement we scored “3” and were described as “performing well”. The Report emphasises that the Council has “good political and managerial leadership [which] ensures effective management and sound governance” with an operational culture which is “strong, providing a sound basis for transparent, relevant and timely decision making. Relationships are characterised by mutual respect”. This is supported by “rigorous arrangements for monitoring and the review of performance information, including in partnership” with the Council having a culture of “improvement and learning”. Together, this has resulted in “the Council and its partners...delivering improved quality of life for the people of Telford & Wrekin”.
- 3.6 The Report emphasises the progress we have made with our partners on community safety, physical, economic and social regeneration, enabling more older people to live independently, and that local people are now living longer and healthier lives. Outcomes for children and young people are described as “good”.
- 3.7 These findings are, overall, a reflection of the hard work and commitment of Members, officers and all of our partners to ensuring we

are focused on and deliver ongoing improvement to the quality of life experienced by all residents in the Borough.

4 NEXT STEPS: DRIVING ORGANISATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

- 4.1 A key purpose of the Corporate Assessment process is to help councils identify areas for improvement. The Assessment Report identifies two such areas. Whilst the Council is making real improvements in the delivery of its equality and diversity strategies, the Report argues that we need to sharpen our overall strategic focus in this area. The second area relates to performance management which the Report, again, recognises as a real strength, but is an area they suggest we need to develop Members' "challenge" role and work to ensure that all our performance measures and targets are making a tangible difference in the Borough.
- 4.2 As well as developing a response to these two specific areas, we are now developing proposals to drive forward the Council's organisational improvement agenda more widely. It is our intention to link this improvement agenda to Priority Plans as they are refreshed in the coming months. A first step in this process will be to identify and prioritise issues for change and development.
- 4.3 We will also use this process to initiate preparations for Comprehensive Area Assessment which will replace CPA as the Audit Commission's core local authority inspection regime from April 2009.
- 4.4 Finally, to have such positive recognition of the Council and how we operate from the Audit Commission through the Corporate Assessment process is very pleasing. However, our focus must now be on moving forward as there are many issues and challenges in the Borough to address. We will continue to deliver improving services and working towards being an efficient, effective and customer-focused Council that delivers value-for-money for the community.

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APPENDIX ONE: TELFORD & WREKIN CORPORATE ASSESSMENT REPORT

Executive summary

5 The Council is performing strongly. Effective leadership, responsive systems and strong partnership working are delivering good outcomes for local people. The Council and its partners have developed clear and challenging ambitions to transform the borough so that residents can enjoy better quality of life. This long term strategic vision is underpinned by a set of inter-connecting short and medium term strategies.

6 Partnership working is well established and effective. There is a genuine sense of shared ownership of the vision for the borough, characterised by the strap line 'Team Telford', and this is based on a clear understanding of how the local challenges and opportunities fit into the wider regional and national context. Delivery is supported by a robust strategic framework and excellent working relationships.

7 Priorities are firmly based on a sound understanding of the needs and views of local people, derived from close consultation with, and detailed data about, local communities. Priorities are designed to make the most of local and regional opportunities and translate into action through outcome based targets. Sound service and financial planning translate the priorities into actions for council services, and robust performance management ensures that delivery remains on track.

8 The Council is a strong community leader, working astutely with others in the public, private and voluntary sectors. It champions the needs of Telford and Wrekin to maximise benefits for the local area, and to promote improvement in the wider area. This is making a real difference to the borough, and enhancing the prospects for growth and prosperity in the sub-region.

9 Political and managerial leadership are strong and effective. The Leader and Chief Executive are well regarded throughout the Council, ambitions and organisational values are well communicated internally and externally and a 'can do' culture amongst staff maximises their ability to deliver against the Council's ambitions. Good workforce planning underpins the effective deployment of staff, and excellent partnership working, especially with the local PCT, further enhances capacity. The Council has been slow to improve ICT and Customer Access but clear plans are now in place to upgrade customer access with agreed capital and revenue in place. The Council provides good value for money, driven by a commitment to reduce the financial burden on local taxpayers.

10 The Council has a good track record of effective performance management, with an appetite for performance improvement that is shared with partners. The well established systems to monitor and manage

performance are rigorous and the Council and its partners have continued to work to improve them.

11 Working with its partners, the Council has made tangible improvements to the quality of life in Telford and Wrekin in the last three years. Achievements reflect the focus on social and physical regeneration, especially in the borough's most deprived communities.

12 The Council has spearheaded the drive to transform the borough through social and physical regeneration. It has worked closely with partners to create the conditions whereby the borough can resolve some of the long standing socio-economic problems that were built into the original design of Telford New Town. In doing so, it has already attracted additional high quality inward investment to the Borough, significantly improved the local skills base, and made a strong start to improving the quality of life in housing estates in the most deprived areas. The creation of a local urban regeneration company, Transforming Telford, has drawn in over £15 million from Advantage West Midlands on the back of pooled land assets with English Partnerships and the impact of that is already beginning to be felt, for example in tackling poorer housing conditions in the private sector. The Council is actively shaping sustainable communities by ensuring that the ambitious local building programme learns from past mistakes, with the first phases of three new communities already characterised by high quality design, community focus, accessibility and a strong commitment to sound environmental practice. The local environment has also improved through increased recycling, enhanced access to, and satisfaction with local public transport, and the provision of improved open spaces and cycle paths.

13 A strong multi-agency approach has significantly reduced crime and anti-social behaviour. Crime levels overall are below average, and the local crime reduction partnership is the most improved in the country. All major crime rates have fallen since 2003/04, some of them, such as burglary, dramatically. Engagement with minority communities is building cohesion, as is work with partners on hate crime. People feel increasingly safe in the borough.

14 The strategic approach to health taken by the Council and its partners has achieved improved outcomes in the health of local people, but challenges remain. Rates of cancer and coronary heart disease have reduced and are now much closer to those for England as a whole. The gap on life expectancy has also closed. The Council and its partners have taken a creative and integrated approach to healthier lifestyles, learning and community cohesion which has won national support from sporting governing bodies. However, problems with alcohol abuse and teenage pregnancy remain.

15 The Council and its partners take a strategic approach to meeting the needs of older people, and the carers who support them. A clear focus on encouraging and maintaining independence is achieving outcomes for frail or otherwise vulnerable elderly people. There is a wide range of initiatives across service areas aimed at older people, and close policy engagement with, and valued support for, the local Senior Citizen's Forum. These programmes take

increasing account of the needs of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community and other groups at risk of disadvantage.

16 Outcomes for children are good and generally improving. Most health outcomes are in line with similar authorities and all referrals to specialist mental health services are seen within expected timescales. Educational achievements are in line with similar authorities. Looked after children live in stable placements and a high number receive timely health assessments. Young people have good opportunities to contribute their views and these influence changes in service delivery. Fewer children, and adults, are being killed or injured on the borough's roads.

17 The Council's overall approach to equality and diversity is good, but sometimes lacks both coherence and impact. It clearly understands the range of factors that impact on equality of outcomes for local people, and takes this into account in its approach to service design, delivery and management. There are clear structures and mechanisms in place for managing and implementing activity in support of equality and diversity, and robust plans for monitoring impact and driving further improvement. And the Council's commitment to achieving a workforce that is reflective of the local population has been reflected in the recent increase in the proportion of staff with disabilities. However, the growing network of delivery to diverse groups within the community requires stronger strategic focus. Impact is often unclear and; despite the recent changes in the composition of the workforce, the proportion of BME staff remains low.

18 The Council delivers good value for money. There is a robust and well established system for delivering this, with a full participation by councillors that adds real value.