

Report of Director of People and Improvement

**Deciding and Delivering Council Priorities
– Audit Commission report**

Summary

1. This report summarises the main findings and recommendations arising from the Audit Commission's study of our arrangements for deciding and delivering the Council priorities.
2. The full report was considered by the Audit and Governance Committee on 31st January 2007. Based on the council-wide implications of prioritisation, its importance and the clear links between prioritisation and CPA, the committee recommended that the key matters raised in the report should also be considered by the Executive.

Background

3. The Audit Commission carried out a review of the council's prioritisation arrangements in mid 2006. One of the purposes of this review was specifically to help the Council to understand the improvements necessary to respond effectively to the prioritisation Key Line Of Enquiry in the CPA Corporate Assessment process.

Key Messages

4. The Commission commented positively on the way that the Council has identified its priorities as part of the development of the Corporate Strategy. However it identified a significant amount of remaining improvement work to deliver the priorities and embed them into the day to day business of the Council.
5. Five main improvement themes were identified by the Commission. These are:
 - Improving links between service planning and prioritisation
 - Ensuring that decisions on resource allocation are influenced by priorities
 - Integrating priorities into our performance management systems
 - Learning from experience in delivering our priorities
 - Ensuring priorities are owned by everyone in the Council and communicated both internally and externally

6. The Organisational Effectiveness Programme (OEP) approved by the Executive in July 2006 included a number of actions to address the majority of the improvement recommendations made by the Commission. Actions not already in the OEP have since been incorporated within it as part of developing priority Delivery and Innovation Plans (DIPs).
7. Good progress has been made since in delivering these actions. Priority champions have helped drive the delivery of priorities forward; priorities have been widely communicated; and service planning processes have been improved to make much stronger links to priorities. In addition, the delivery of the OEP and Corporate Strategy remain high on the agenda for the Chief Executive and recently appointed Director of People and Improvement.
8. However a key area which remains to be improved is the way in which priorities influence the allocation of resources, in particular as part of the budget process. Further work on this planned but needs to be completed relatively quickly. This is an important area which we need to improve, it will be critical in CPA terms and will be a focus of attention for the Commission when they assess our progress in June.

Consultation

9. The full Audit Commission report, update letter and recommendations have been considered by the Corporate Management Team and the Audit and Governance Committee. Improving the way that the Council prioritises and delivers its priorities forms a key part of the OEP approved by the Executive in July 2006.

Options

10. Prioritisation is one of the 4 key strands within the CPA Corporate Assessment process. As referred to above, the Executive have previously approved a range of actions to improve the way that the Council prioritises and delivers its priorities as part of the OEP.

Corporate Priorities

11. The actions outlined in this paper directly support the delivery the Council's organisational effectiveness priorities – in particular “improving leadership at all levels”.
12. Improving prioritisation will also support more effective delivery of the Council's nine service-related priorities which are set out in the Corporate Strategy.

Implications

13. Improving the way that the Council prioritises and delivers its priorities potentially impacts on the way that the Council allocates its financial, human, legal, IT and property resources.

Risk Management

14. Failure to implement improvements to our prioritisation arrangements is likely to affect the Council's ability to deliver its priorities and affect the Council's CPA corporate assessment rating.

Recommendation

15. Members of the Executive are asked to:
- note the key findings of the Audit Commission study and the actions in response to them
 - support further work on improving our prioritisation arrangements

Reason: To note the progress in improving the Council's prioritisation arrangements and support work on improving them further

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Specialist Implications Officer Wards Affected

CMT 6th December
ALL

Background papers:

Audit and Governance Committee report 31st January 2007 - Deciding and Delivering
Council Priorities