

**Audit & Governance Committee**

**21 December 2009**

Report of the Director of Resources

**Response to Comprehensive Area Assessment 2009  
(including Improvement Plan 2009/10 Update)**

**Summary**

1. To provide an initial response to the findings highlighted in the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment reports. The response includes the delivery of the 2009/10 milestones contained within the council's Improvement Plan as approved by Executive on 21 July 2009.

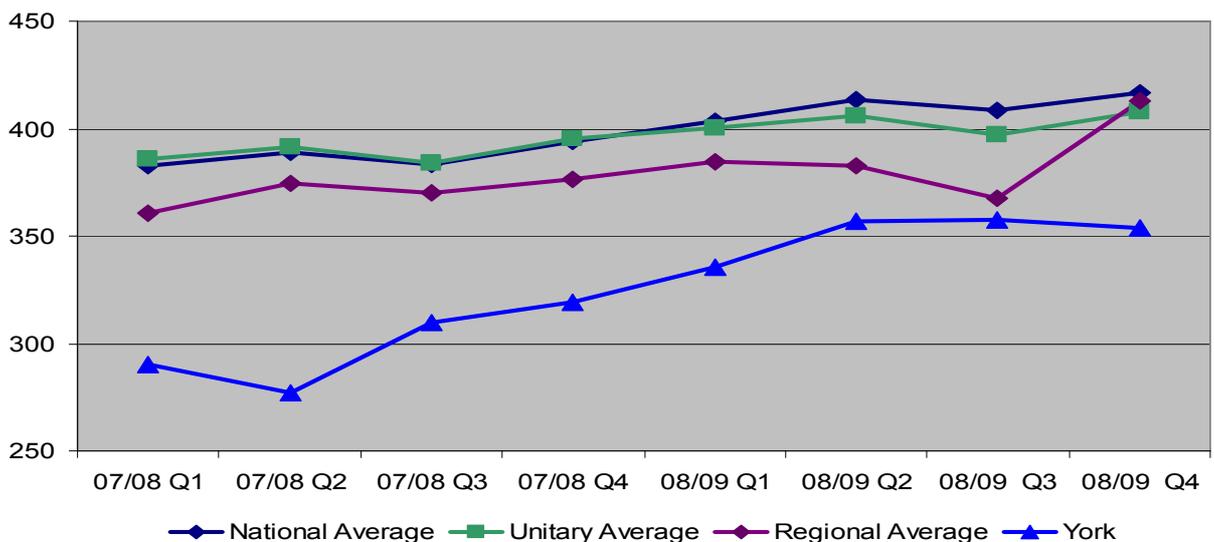
**Background**

**Response to the Area Assessment Report**

2. The council is delighted with the findings of the Comprehensive Area Assessment reports which have highlighted a number of areas of high and excellent performance which has contributed to the award of a green flag and no red flags and places the city of York in a strong position nationally (see agenda item 10). The council and its partners have been recognised as working well in delivering the priorities set down by the citizens of York.
3. In addition to excellent partnership performance, the council itself has also achieved a 'performing well' status in managing the performance of services, a clear audit opinion on the council's financial statements and a clear value for money opinion.
4. Whilst the majority of the Audit Commission's reports are accurate and have been discussed and agreed with the council and its partners, the following matters have been raised with the Area Assessment Lead, which present an inaccurate picture of the performance within the city. These have been challenged previously and are of significant public interest. They appear on page Page 4 and 11 of Annex A (detailed report) to the CAA Report:

- *'Adults are not as physically active as they should be and this is contributing to increased obesity'*. The council had previously provided conclusive evidence previously that this analysis is inaccurate. The Audit Commission have confirmed that the Area Assessment reports need amending to reflect the error, but this may not take place until a week after publication.
- *'Binge drinking is also increasing and has resulted in an increase Alcohol related hospital admissions' and 'the number of alcohol related hospital admissions is increasing.....the number is expected to rise further'*. This is a priority area for York (NPI 39). Whilst it is accepted that overall rates increased on the previous year, at the end of 2008/09 York was still well below the unitary, regional and national average and is currently moving against the regional trend, with the last three quarters flattening out / reducing.

Graph: York's rate of alcohol-related admissions per 100,000 population



- The report also contains negative statements regarding the city's mental health services, when the national in-patient survey puts the city in the top 20 per cent of mental health trusts nationally for quality of patient care.
5. The Audit Commission's response on the above two points is that Oneplace is an on-going assessment, and it makes sense for them to look at the issues early in their programme, so they can update the Oneplace content as soon as is possible if it is appropriate to do so (the content will be updated quarterly). The lack of an early response on this will mean that an inaccurate view may be formed of the city until the reports are amended

6. Despite this the process is recognised to have identified areas for further review, such as the need for improved sports facilities, and is a judgement made of the city, not just the council. The detailed findings of the assessment have been fed back to the city's Local Strategic Partnership (Without Walls or WoW) Partnership Board, via the WoW Executive Delivery Board. The Board is being asked to take overall responsibility for ensuring improvements are made across the city. WoW fully respects the importance of this approach to delivering the improvements complementing current arrangements within the partnership and the council and a report will be brought back to Executive in the New Year.
7. The response to CAA will fit within the wider WoW improvement agenda that includes:
  - The outcomes of the successful WoW annual conference in September 2009, where a wide selection of partners identified future actions regarding challenges facing the city;
  - Monitoring progress against the strategic aims and actions under each of the seven themes within the Sustainable Community Strategy;
  - Ensuring the WoW partnership is fit for purpose to deliver the SCS, LAA and respond to the challenges of CAA.
8. These activities will identify improvements for WoW and its partnerships and partners to work on. A coordinated approach to identifying and agreeing these improvements will be developed to ensure that no improvements 'fall between the cracks', and repetition of effort is avoided. These improvements will incorporate issues identified in the Area Assessment and are likely to include:
  - Sustaining the proactive response to the recession (e.g. Improving Adult Skills, Working age people claiming out of work benefits);
  - Embedding the Fairness and Inclusion Strategy across the City;
  - Tackling Climate Change;
  - Developing a new Transport Strategy for the City;
  - Sharing the learning from the successful Kingsway West project and rolling the pilot out to other areas in the city;
  - Increasing Adult participation in physical activity;
  - Implementing the strategy to make York a 'Volunteering City'.
  - Encouraging a more collaborative approach to the Commissioning of services between partners.

## Response to the Organisational Assessment Report

9. The council welcomes the exceptional service performance and improvements highlighted in the 'Managing Performance' aspect of the report, particularly relating to children's and adults' services. The Audit Commission has highlighted areas for improvement in the Use of Resources Assessment, which was reported in detail to the Audit & Governance Committee on 21 September 2009. The assessment primarily covered the period from 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009 – the response to this is partially covered in paragraphs 11 to 20 below through the reported delivery of Improvement Plan actions, with a further plan for new areas developed as outlined in paragraph 21 below.
10. In response to governance and Use of Resources self assessments in July 2009, the Executive agreed the milestones and activity contained within the 2009/10 Improvement Plan, which covered nine major areas for corporate improvement arising from those assessments. Members requested that future updates on progress be reported back to the Executive; these are outlined below and progress against milestones summarised in Annex A.

### Improvement Plan Progress To Date

11. Progress is summarised under each theme of the Improvement Plan and overall progress monitored by Executive against targets set within the Corporate Strategy.
12. **HR:** This area for improvement followed up on work done in 2008/09, and the key areas of progress for this year include:
  - a. **the launch of e-recruitment**, the ability both for applicants to apply for jobs online, and for managers to manage the recruitment process online. The e-recruitment project went live for three directorates, Chief Executives, Resources and City Strategy in November 2009, and will be rolled out to the other three in due course.
  - b. **Pay and Grading** has reached the stage of notifying all appeal outcomes to staff, after which there will be further follow-up actions but the full process is expected to be complete by the end of the financial year.
  - c. **Workforce Planning** is concentrating on the development of a Workforce Planning Strategy, and consultation on a preliminary draft is currently being carried out with Directorate Management Teams and the Joint Consultative Committee.
13. **Fairness & Inclusion (formerly Equalities):** The new national Equality Framework has introduced a new standard of equalities that CYC is currently working towards. This is a far more exacting standard, and there

is considerable work under way to secure the initial level of “Developing” within the framework, with plans to progress quickly onto the next level of “Achieving” by 2011. Further work has commenced across the council to be discussed with partners, to strengthen arrangements for social inclusion and equality of access to services. Finally, additional training on human rights is to be arranged.

14. **Health & Safety:** Work has been continuing from last year to promote a culture of safe working practices across the council, and a regular newsletter has been successfully launched. The analysis of training needs for all staff has been rolled into the replacement HR system, known as the Delphi Replacement Project, which will cover all training needs for staff. The Health & Safety (H&S) team are developing courses at present, which will be delivered through the training and development centre. Audits of Health and Safety practice are ongoing, and the H&S team are introducing a web-based risk assessment system to ensure that risks are reviewed and adequate control measures are put in place.
15. **Member Training:** Substantial progress has been made in working towards the IDeA Charter Status for Member Training and Development. A steering group was established in May 2009, and this year’s Member Development Programme has set out a wide variety of events in which members can participate. A Member handbook will be developed in the near future, and the initial external assessment of Member Development is expected to take place in Spring 2010.
16. **Project and Programme Management:** The aim of this workstream is to introduce a standardised project and programme management methodology across the council. York’s project management approach is currently being used to deliver the More for York programme, which is council-wide in its impact, however, the majority of milestones within this workstream, such as agreeing standard templates and a gateway review process, are still to be achieved. This, however, does not reflect that project management as an approach is fully embedded in the council; it is the future corporate framework for the council’s Business Model that is yet to be developed.
17. **Code of Conduct Awareness:** A fraud survey is currently being conducted amongst officers to gain further insight into code of conduct issues and levels of management awareness. Online fraud awareness training is being developed and will be available shortly. Training on the officer code of conduct is planned for later in the year. Current audit work is also looking at whistleblowing procedures, which picks up an item raised in the staff survey, and will inform future training programmes.
18. **Partnership Governance:** The current governance arrangement for partnerships and the Compact with the voluntary sector have been reviewed. The York Compact Group have agreed to adopt a set of dispute resolution procedures similar to those currently in use in Derby. Current governance arrangements for significant partnerships will be analysed

against the council's own best practice partnership guidelines, and training on partnership governance will be delivered by the end of the financial year.

19. **Internal Communications:** The new intranet, christened 'colin' (council on-line information network), is under development and due for a phased launch from January onwards. Once the launch is under way, there will be an audit of internal publications, and new publications likely from April onwards. A communications audit will also examine the role and practice of team briefings, to understand existing cascades and barriers to good communication, which is to be completed by the end of the financial year.
20. **Risk Management:** Risk reporting has been successfully integrated into the new performance management framework, and the key corporate risks examined and the risk register refreshed. The Risk Management Policy and Strategy have both been revised and the council is on target to deliver the revised Corporate Risk Monitor, reporting on risk management activity, by the end of December this year.

### **Further Developments**

21. An analysis has been undertaken to identify new areas to be built into a supplementary action plan which are necessary, as a result of the Use of Resources Assessment and with a view to moving the council to 'Performing Well' in Use of Resources - lead officers have been identified to implement those actions. This plan is being monitored by the CAA Steering Group chaired by the Director of Resources and progress will be monitored by the Audit & Governance Committee.
22. The Audit Commission are already reviewing improvements since the last Organisational Assessment, and must have a draft opinion on Use of Resources 2009/10 by the end of March 2010, much earlier than in previous years.
23. Corporate and partnership planning processes are under way to develop the actions and milestones necessary to deliver outcomes for York's residents in 2010/11 onwards, and full cognisance will be taken of those areas in the Area Assessment where the Audit Commission want to focus their attention in 2010.

### **Consultation**

24. In November 2009 the Directors responsible for each improvement workstream were consulted, and they have provided the information that is summarised in this report.

### **Options**

25. No other options are presented as this report is an update report as requested by Executive in July 2009.

## Analysis

26. No analysis of options required.

## Corporate Priorities

27. The successful delivery of the CAA improvements and Improvement Plan contributes to the achievement of all community and council priorities, and is a key aim of the “Effective Organisation” priority contained within the Corporate Strategy.

## Implications

28.

- (a) **Financial** There are no financial implications
- (b) **Human Resources (HR)** There are HR implications relating to the HR workstream.
- (c) **Equalities** There will be Equalities implications if the Equalities milestones are not delivered.
- (d) **Legal** There are no immediate legal implications with this report but each area of key activity is likely to generate the need for detailed advice.
- (e) **Crime and Disorder** There are no implications for Crime and Disorder.
- (f) **Information Technology (IT)** There are IT implications contained within the Internal Communications workstream, relating to the new intranet.
- (g) **Property** There are no property implications.
- (h) **Other** No other known implications.

## Risk Management

29. Failure to achieve improvement could affect the next Comprehensive Area Assessment outcomes, which is a key corporate risk on the corporate risk register.

## Recommendations

30. Audit & Governance Members are asked to comment upon the response to the CAA reports, note progress and planned improvements to date and related monitoring and reporting arrangements.

Reason

To ensure that members are aware of the council's response to inspection and audit outcomes, recognise the achievements and also action taken or planned for areas for improvement identified in the report.

**Contact Details**

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**Annexes**

Annex A – Progress against Improvement Plan Milestones.

**Background Papers:**

Executive Report 21 July 2009 on the 2009/10 Improvement Plan