

Subject: Comprehensive Performance
Assessment for Rossendale
Borough Council – Outcome and
Main Findings

Status: For Publication

Report to: The Cabinet

Date: 1st August 2007

Report of: Chief Executive

Portfolio

Holder: Leader

Key Decision: No

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report sets out the main findings of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of Rossendale Borough Council carried out by the Audit Commission in April 2007. This report highlights the fact that the Council scored a total of 40 points and is now categorised as **GOOD** – a position summarised in the CPA report as:

“Over the past three years the Council has worked extremely hard to turn round the problems faced in all areas of its business and can now demonstrate considerable progress. Its current performance is good and it is improving performance in most areas although some are from a low base”.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities and associated corporate objective.

- Well Managed Council (Improvement, Community Network)

The improved management of the Council, as reflected in the CPA report supports the achievement of the Council's other corporate priorities:

- Delivering Quality Services to Customers (Customers, Improvement)
- Delivering Regeneration across the Borough (Economy, Housing)
- Keeping Our Borough Clean and Green (Environment)
- Promoting Rossendale as a cracking place to live and visit (Economy)
- Improving health and well being across the Borough (Health, Housing)

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- The achievement of the category of good under the CPA is an important stage in the improvement process but must not result in complacency. This risk needs to be managed by the Leadership Team to ensure continued emphasis on service improvement and customer focus. The Corporate Plan agreed in June 2007 continues the challenging agenda for the Council.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 Rossendale Borough Council has made significant improvements in all aspects of its operation since the original CPA inspection report was published in January 2004. This change has been well documented in the Progress Assessment Reports published by the Audit Commission and evidenced through improved performance. The Council was clear, throughout the improvement process, in its commitment to an early re-inspection.

4.2 In July 2006, the Audit Commission published a new framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment of district councils. A two stage process was introduced. From 2006 the Audit Commission will undertake re-categorisation activity only where there is significant evidence to indicate a potential change in CPA category. At its meeting on 19 September 2006 Cabinet agreed to apply for re-categorisation in the first tranche. This application was agreed and the inspection took place during the week commencing 16 April 2007.

5. INSPECTION AND OUTCOMES

5.1 The CPA process comprises of a number of stages:

- Self-Assessment against the Key Lines of Enquiry
- Stakeholder survey to partners and neighbouring authorities
- Round Table Visit and tour of the borough
- Inspection Week comprising interviews with Councillors, employees, trade union, and partners.
- Draft Report received for comment.
- Final Report received (embargoed until 31 July 2007).

5.2 A copy of the full CPA report is attached as an appendix. The key messages within the report are summarized below:

Ambition

The Council scored the maximum of 4 points for this area. The report states:

“The Council is performing strongly in this area. Its challenging but achievable ambitions are based on good consultation and analysis. Over the past three years the Council has steadily moved from internally focused improvement activity to developing and fulfilling its place-shaping role through strong community leadership. Through this leadership and excellent partnership working, the Council has shown that it understands what is important to local people and has positioned itself to deliver substantial improvements in these areas”.

Prioritisation

The Council scored 3 out of 4 for this area. The report states:

“The Council is performing well in this area. It has clear, high level priorities which reflect the needs of the community. These priorities, which are shared with partners, fit well with sub-regional, regional and national priorities and enable the Council to stay focused on what needs to be done and to resource it appropriately”.

This section indicates that the lack of an Economic Strategy for the borough is a gap at the present time, but acknowledges that work is already in progress to take this forward.

Capacity

The Council scored 3 out of 4 for this area. The report states:

“The Council is performing well in this area. It has responded to significant weaknesses identified in the corporate assessment in 2004. It has increased its capacity through extensive partnership working. Political and managerial leadership is widely respected and strong; decision making is effective. Scrutiny is developing well, with examples of positive impact. Human resource policies and new management arrangements are in place and have made a significant difference to the organisational culture which is now open and positive. A ‘can do’ attitude among staff is evident. Training and development for both Councillors and staff is a strength. The Council’s approach to equalities and diversity is developing well. The Council continues to face challenges in achieving value for money in all areas and risk management is not fully embedded in partnerships.

The roles and responsibilities of the Leader, Councillors and officers and their delegated powers are clear”.

The report also acknowledges the effectiveness of the LSP and the important role played by Overview and Scrutiny.

Performance Management

The Council scored 3 out of 4 for this area. The report states:

“The Council is performing well in this area. There is a positive culture amongst councillors, managers and staff and a willingness to improve. Improvement has been driven consistently by the corporate centre. This approach is underpinned by a clear performance management framework with guidance in place. Performance in all services is improving overall and where there have been failures in the past, measures have been taken to address this. Performance monitoring within partnerships is well established”.

Achievement and Improvement

The Council scored 2 out of 4 for this area. This reflects the stage of the journey that the Council is on which can be summarized as well-established ambitions supported by clear priorities and the capacity to deliver and the performance management systems to understand progress. Significant achievements have been made, and are acknowledged in the report, but not all our priorities have yet been achieved.

The report states:

“The Council is performing adequately in this area. It has turned round poor performance in waste, street scene, planning and benefits and is starting to improve outcomes for local people. Levels of performance against national indicators are improving but several are from a low base. Based on the Audit Commission's context and performance information pack prepared for this assessment, between 2004/05 and 2005/06, 52 per cent of key indicators improved. In the same period, 26 per cent of indicators reflected top 25 per cent performance. Performance in the last 12 months has improved significantly with 89 per cent of indicators (unaudited) improving.

The Council demonstrates its strong ambitions to raise aspirations and improve the quality of life and is investing well in the building blocks which will address cross-cutting areas. However, it has a challenging agenda and although it is making good progress in areas such as tackling crime, economic development and environmental improvements, it is still on a journey in others and it will take some time before it can deliver the required outcomes”.

5.3 Areas For Improvement

The report identifies three areas for improvement:

- The Council should ensure that it has the monitoring systems and capacity in place to continue to improve in line with its ambitions for the future and that this is sustainable.
- To ensure that the Council can achieve value for money in all services it should ensure that there is greater integration between cost, performance and operational activity with regular monitoring of value for money in day to day management.

- To improve access and inform target setting and service planning within cultural services the Council should develop a comprehensive picture of usage of these services by putting in place management systems to enable service areas to measure usage by people from targeted communities and identify barriers to participation.

These first issues will continue to be addressed in approaches contained in documents such as the Medium Term Financial Strategy, Organisational Development Plan and Corporate Governance work. A separate report in relation to Culture will be brought to Members later in the year.

6. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

- 6.1 Though it is acknowledged that further work is required, in the area of Value for Money, improvements by the Council in Financial, Risk and Asset Management have contributed to the CPA score improving.
- 6.2 The re-categorisation will mean a marginal reduction in annual inspection fees incurred by the council as a result of the reduction in the perception of risk. The reduction in the perception of risk and the increased reputation of the Council may also lead indirectly to other financial benefits.

7. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

- 7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The report is a reflection of the hard work and dedication of staff within Rossendale Borough Council it is very much welcomed and deserved.

8. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES

- 8.1 There are no direct implications however the Council will continue to develop and implement an Organisational Development Plan which equips staff to be able to meet new and future challenges.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Corporate Assessment process marks an important milestone in the improvement journey of the Council. It indicates that a huge amount of progress has been made over recent years which reflects the hard work and commitment of Councillors and employees, as well as partners. It also highlights the importance of listening to local people and working hard to address the issues that matter to them. The report indicates some areas for development. These will be incorporated into the Council's existing plans and work programmes to ensure continued progress and improvement for the people of Rossendale.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 9.1 That the report be noted.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1

11. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is an Equality Impact Assessment required No

Is an Equality Impact Assessment attached No

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Background Papers	
Document	
CPA Recategorisation Cabinet September 2006	www.rossendalebc.gov.uk
Corporate Assessment Report: Rossendale July 2007	http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk