

**TO: THE EXECUTIVE
18 MARCH 2008**

**CORPORATE ASSESSMENT FINAL AUDIT COMMISSION REPORT AND
IMPROVEMENT PLAN
(Chief Executive)**

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 As part of the wider Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) "The Harder Test", the Audit Commission published on 19 February 2008 their final report on their Corporate Assessment (CA) of Bracknell Forest Borough Council. This report sets out the main findings of the report and highlights the areas of improvement which the Audit Commission has recommended that Bracknell Forest Borough Council should review.
- 1.2 In order to address the areas of improvement identified, we have developed a Corporate Assessment Improvement Plan, whose actions will be included and monitored through service plans of the relevant directorates. The Plan will be shared with the Audit Commission. Approval is now sought from CMT on the actions included in the Improvement Plan. CMT to note that an earlier draft of the Improvement Plan was circulated on 6 February for comment.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That CMT's reviews the findings of the final Corporate Assessment Report (Appendix A) from the Audit Commission.**
- 2.2 **That CMT finalises and approved the proposed actions on the Improvement Plan (Appendix B).**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is important for the Council to respond to the final findings of Audit Commission's report and take action on the areas of improvement identified.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The final Corporate Assessment Report (Appendix A) reflects discussions held between the Council and the Audit Commission on their findings and have undergone their own internal consistency process. Although it is arguable that the prioritisation judgement in particular does not fully recognise the excellent work done by the Council, the Chief Executive and leading Councillors decided it would not be a productive use of time or resources to appeal against the findings of the final Corporate Assessment Report during the appeal period between December 2007 and January 2008. The Improvement Plan (Appendix B) has been developed with the relevant lead officers and Directors and reflects existing service priorities and planned actions.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Main Findings of the Corporate Assessment Report (Appendix A)

Scoring

- 5.1 Each key line of enquiry assessed under the CA was given a score out of 4 which translates as:

- 1 – Inadequate Performance (*below minimum requirements*)
- 2 – Adequate Performance (*at only minimum requirements*)
- 3 – Performing well (*consistently above minimum requirements*)
- 4 – Performing strongly (*well above minimum requirements*)

- 5.2 The Council received an overall Corporate Assessment Score of 3 – ‘Performing well’. The scores and main findings for each key line of enquiry are detailed below.

Ambition – score: 4

- 5.3 This is the Council’s highest scoring area of the report. The Audit Commission found that the Council has clear and challenging ambitions which are founded on a sense of pride for the area and a commitment to quality of life and environment and an understanding of local, regional and national context.

- 5.4 The Council has a good understanding of the challenges it faces and, with its good political and managerial leadership, takes the leading role with partners to properly articulate the long-term ambitions for the area through the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and the Local Area Agreement (LAA). These challenging and sustainable ambitions are supported by the Council’s vision and medium-term objectives are reflective of what is important to local people as result of effective engagement, consultation and communication with the public.

- 5.5 Large scale projects such as the housing stock transfer and the waste management and disposal facilities agreement were cited as examples of the Council’s challenging ambitions. The regeneration of Bracknell town centre in particular was used to demonstrate the scale of the Council’s “outstanding commitment, pride and ambition” for the community and the region.

Prioritisation – score: 3

- 5.6 It was acknowledged that the Council has in its priorities “appropriately focussed on local and national issues and addressing the needs of the local community”. Long-term priorities are clear and have been developed effectively in partnership. The LAA is seen as a clear framework for sharing those priorities and improving outcomes for local communities. Effective prioritisation, information sharing and good understanding among partner organisations helps to ensure realism and delivery of ambitions.

- 5.7 It was felt that the streamlining of the Council’s objectives for 2008-2011 has improved the Council’s focus and the over-arching priorities are closely linked to the wider ambitions for the area. The Audit Commission highlighted the Council’s

priorities are underpinned by robust or developing strategies in all key areas to deliver its priorities by providing a good framework for service planning.

- 5.8 The Audit Commission recognised that while delivering good value for money the Council has maintained a good focus on its priorities by working to balance its budget and taking difficult decisions including transferring the housing stock, instituting alternative weekly waste collections and dealing with the development constraints of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. The Council was judged as well placed to take further difficult decisions in order to maintain its priority services and a balanced budget.

Capacity – score: 3

- 5.9 The Audit Commission believes the Council is meeting the challenges it faces as a small unitary council with knowledgeable and effective councillors, robust decision-making frameworks and supportive and well-trained staff. Delivery is seen as effectively supported by HR, project management, risk management and ICT and capacity increased through good partnership working and effective service management. Decision-making, scrutiny and standards of behaviour structures are also effective.

Performance Management – score: 3

- 5.10 Performance management is judged as effective, with a strong cross-council commitment and is bolstered by external and overview and scrutiny challenges. It is used to drive improvement which the Audit Commission saw in all priority areas for the Council and recognised a history of achievement in most service, improvement in weaker areas and delivering community benefits across shared priorities with partners. The good balance between delivering on local needs and national and regional issues has been evidenced by good results in national performance indicators and satisfaction levels among local residents. The Council also communicates well on its performance to staff, councillors and the public.

Achievement – score: 3

- 5.11 The report acknowledged that the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and its work to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour is improving. Adult Social Services was also highlighted as having improved and was seen to deliver good outcomes to older people in the Borough. Health and well-being was seen as supported through the Council's work to promote the take up of exercise, leisure and the addressing of health inequalities. Outcomes for children and young people were assessed as good with most in need benefiting from prompt and effective services. A strong focus was noted on promoting sustainable communities and good outcomes were seen to be achieved in most areas including waste management, planning, housing and the management of public spaces. Work towards sustainable transport outcomes was seen to increase the use of cycling, buses and walking while keeping traffic growth and congestion in check.

Areas for Improvement

- 5.12 As part of its report, the Audit Commission highlighted areas to be improved by the Council as listed below and which the Improvement Plan (Appendix B) looks to address:

- Level of the Qualities Standard for Local Government

- The completion and implementation of current black and minority ethnic community mapping work
- Addressing of low representation of black and minority ethnic and disabled workers among staff.
- Developing a medium and longer term workforce plan which is shared with partners
- Developing actions to address fear of crime
- Building on work targeting sustainability within the Council

Effect on overall CPA Rating

- 5.13 The Council has received an overall score of 3 in the 'Harder Test' Corporate Assessment. It is worth noting, that only 6 Councils have achieved a higher score than Bracknell Forest under the Harder Test Corporate Assessment rules, and each of these has only scored '4' on two Key Lines of Inquiry. As the Bracknell Forest score is lower than the 2004 CA rating of 4, both the new and previous scores are included in the authority's scorecard, but the higher of the two scores has been used to determine the overall CPA category, until all councils have undergone a CA under the 'Harder Test' rules. It is expected that this protection will be lifted once the Audit Commission publishes its 2008 CPA scores in February 2009, although this proposal is currently under consultation as part of the CPA 2008 framework guidance. The final guidance will be published in April 2008.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 Nothing to add to the report.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 No additional funding has been incorporated within the 2008/09 budget to help deliver the action plan attached to this report. The report assumes that where resources or effort is required it is provided from within existing budget and staffing resources.

Impact Assessment

- 6.3 The Improvement Plan itself includes actions to address equalities issues raised as part of the Corporate Assessment Report.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Risk management issues relating to actions in this plan have been or will be dealt with as part of the service planning process.

Other Officers

- 6.5 None.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 The Improvement Plan was sent to CT and other key officers for comment.

Background Papers

Appendix A - Corporate Assessment: Bracknell Forest Borough Council (*Audit Commission, February 2008*)

Appendix B - Bracknell Forest Borough Council Corporate Assessment Improvement Plan 2008-2010 (*v.1.1. 15-02-08*)

Contact for further information

Victor Nicholls
Assistant Chief Executive
Victor.Nicholls@Bracknell-Forest.gov.uk
Tel: 5604

Morag Dowds
Senior Policy Officer
Morag.Dowds@Bracknell-Forest.gov.uk
Tel:2174

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