

COUNCIL

17 JUNE 2008

**CORPORATE ASSESSMENT REPORT AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN: REPORT
OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CHAIRMAN OF CABINET**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To recommend to Council that work is undertaken to establish both the scope of the actions and resources required to respond to the areas raised by the Audit Commission as areas in which the Council needs to improve.

2. DECISIONS REQUIRED

- (i) That Council be recommended to ensure that work is undertaken to establish the scope of the actions and resources required to respond to both the acceleration of the Council's Equalities work, Performance Management and in independent review of Governance. The cost associated with this will be reported back through the Corporate Budget Monitoring Report with the intention, at this stage, of this being funded from part of the 2007/8 General Fund surplus;
- (ii) The Asset Management Group be asked to report specifically on physical access to buildings for people with disabilities (by October 2008);
- (iii) Note that the detailed improvement plans will be implemented through Management Action/Business Plans;
- (iv) Request the Overview and Scrutiny Board to consider the appropriate timing for review of the effectiveness of the Council's response to the Corporate Assessment Report.

3. BACKGROUND/INFORMATION

- 3.1 As Members are aware, the Audit Commission had carried out a Corporate Assessment of the Council and the Council had been assessed as performing well and achieved an Inspection score of 3 out of 4, thus retaining its overall 4 star CPA rating. All Members of the Council had been circulated with a copy of the Report with the Cabinet Papers on 3 June 2008.
- 3.2 Members of the Council received a Presentation from the Lead Inspector of the Audit Commission on 12 May 2008 where some of the Council's areas for improvement were identified, including:
- Governance Arrangements

- Approach to Equalities and Diversity
- Improvement in Performance Management Practices

- 3.3 I enclose for Members' information a copy of the Areas for Improvement (Appendix B to the Report to Cabinet 3 June 2008) together with pages 6 to 9 of the Corporate Assessment Report from the Audit Commission dated February 2008, the "Executive Summary" and "Areas for Improvement".
- 3.4 I would remind Members that the whole document is available electronically at the Borough of Poole Website or copies may be obtained from Democratic Services.

Councillor Brian Leverett
Leader of the Council and Chairman of Cabinet

Appendix B

Areas for Improvement (paragraph references refer to the Corporate Assessment report) :-

1. **Equalities** (in particular, paras 11, 12, 16 & 61) – the Council has a good strategic approach but it is thought to be too slow. Operational aspects are underdeveloped, we don't use Equality Impact Assessments consistently and we haven't capitalised on consultation with staff groups. Consequently we don't use our understanding of the needs of all residents to inform service delivery. Physical access to services for people with disabilities is variable.

Despite our best efforts we need to do more. Restricted budgets are one barrier to making more progress, more quickly. For example, we have no corporate equalities budget. To support service units (eg with undertaking EQIAs , with more detailed engagement with groups about implementing service changes etc) it is recommended that a corporate budget be established (for two years) and that a costed action plan be presented to Council in July. We should also review the priority being given to DDA work at the next capital programme review.

2. **Governance** (in particular paragraphs 10,15,51,52)- some aspects of governance are weak. Although the Council is making changes to Overview and Scrutiny, at the time of the inspection it was not effective. There should be a separation of policy makers (ie cabinet) from development control in planning. The quality of partnership arrangements is generally good but there are some exceptions.

During 2007/8 members worked on and agreed significant changes to Overview and Scrutiny. They have been implemented for the new Civic Year but It is obviously too early to assess how effective they will be. The Leader has already indicated his wish to reduce the number of Cabinet members on the Planning Committee. It would be appropriate to have an independent assessment of how effective these changes have been , say, after 9 months. This work could cost around £15,000.

Equally, we can make progress most quickly on partnership governance if we contract out the work.

3. **Performance management** (particularly paragraphs 13, 17,62, 67). We are introducing new systems but will still need to strengthen the links between priority issues, budgets, performance and risk -- in the Council and in partnerships and for members as well as officers.

There is a paradox here. The report says we are strong on achievement but less so on performance management. Undoubtedly there is a strong performance culture among members and officers – but we are not underpinning that sufficiently at a corporate level. This is an area where we need to add to our capacity. A recommended solution – which also covers improving support to Overview and Scrutiny - is being developed and will be brought back to Cabinet in July.