

Cabinet – 13 April 2005

CPA - Corporate Assessment Report

Portfolio: Councillor Tom Ansell – Leader of the Council

Service Area: Corporate, council-wide issue

Wards: All

Forward Plan: No

Summary of report

This report presents the latest Corporate Assessment report published by the Audit Commission on 4 April 2005, following their second inspection of Walsall Council. The Council has been awarded 37 points for this element of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) which, when combined with the other aspects of the council's service performance, results in the Council being categorised as "FAIR". A draft improvement plan is planned to be considered at the first Cabinet meeting of the new municipal year. The Audit Commission's report is attached at **Appendix 1**.

Recommendations

1. That the Audit Commission's corporate assessment report attached at **Appendix 1** be formally received.
2. That the contents of the corporate assessment report published on 4 April 2005, and the resulting re-categorisation of the Council to "FAIR" for CPA purposes be acknowledged and celebrated.
3. That a draft improvement plan will be brought to Cabinet at its first meeting of the new municipal year be noted.

Resource and legal considerations

The cost of the Audit Commission inspection regime is included within their core annual audit fee.

Citizen impact

The corporate assessment report demonstrates that the Council's corporate governance arrangements and corporate ability overall continue to be strong, with processes being embedded. The report also identifies areas for improvement, which the council will address in a robust improvement plan.

Community safety

The report includes judgements relating to some elements of community safety. For example, that domestic burglaries and vehicle crime have decreased.

Environmental impact

Sound corporate governance and ability provide a firm foundation on which excellent service delivery can be rapidly achieved and sustained.

Performance and risk management issues

Co-ordination of the CPA inspection and an overarching role regarding other inspections falls within the remit of the Corporate Performance Management service. The CPA lies at the heart of Council activity and will support the organisation's aim of becoming an excellent council in both CPA and customer satisfaction terms by 2008. The final improvement plan will include a comprehensive risk assessment.

Equality implications

None directly relating to this report.

Consultation

The corporate assessment report was prepared by the Audit Commission following their period of inspection during February and March 2005. Their on-site work comprised an extensive series of meetings, workshops, interviews, focus groups, and appraisal of substantial written evidence and documentation.

Vision 2008

The overarching vision for the council is to achieve excellent CPA status by 2008. The action plan, when implemented, is anticipated to deliver this outcome.

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Signed:




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Carole Evans
Executive Director

4 April 2005

Signed:



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Councillor Tom Ansell
Leader of the Council

4 April 2005

1. CONTEXT – THE CPA REPORT

1.1 The corporate assessment report confirms that *“Walsall MBC has continued to improve since 2004.”* and that we are *“an ambitious council: driving service improvements; improving the way [we] work”*.

1.2 Since our first corporate assessment inspection a year ago, we have focussed on key service priorities such as social care, housing, environment, and education, and in embedding strong corporate governance. This has provided a good foundation to enable further improvement and delivery of excellent services across the board.

1.3 The report provides a consistent picture of improvement, innovation and corporate strength. The key positive messages can be summarised as follows:

- Clearly defined ambitions.
- Significant strengths in prioritisation.
- Intense focus on improving services and establishing effective mechanisms.
- Performance management mechanisms are effective.
- Approach to learning has improved.
- Self-aware.
- Good capacity, strong corporate management, good staff morale with a “can do together” culture.
- Sound financial management.
- Significant strengths in the way we invest in our future.
- Risk management is embedded.

1.4 The key adjectives used to describe the Council throughout the report are:

sound **robust** **embedded** **effective** **clear**
strong **improved** **proactive** **systematic** **good**

1.5 In common with all councils, the report outlines scope for improvement within the categories. This will be managed through the use of a comprehensive improvement action plan, which will be brought to a future meeting of Cabinet.

2. CPA REPORT FINDINGS

2.1 The report judges the council’s ability within four headings:

- What is the council trying to achieve?
- How has the council set about delivering its priorities?
- What has the council achieved/not achieved to date?
- In the light of what the council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?

2.2 Within each of these overarching questions, are a series of 9 sub categories (Key Lines of Enquiry – KLOEs) each of which are scored between 1 and 4, with 4 being the highest score, as follows:

①	Many weaknesses and few strengths	②	Overall weaknesses outweigh strengths
③	Strengths outweigh weaknesses	④	Many strengths and few weaknesses

2.3 Various weightings are applied to each raw score to determine an overall total score. Of the 9 categories, we have achieved scores of 3 or 4 in eight of them, recognising the strength of our arrangements. We scored the maximum possible 4/4 in 3 categories: prioritisation, investment and learning. We scored 2/4 in only one category: achievement. We have moved forward in all categories. The criteria for securing additional points within each category are very rigorous so sometimes despite improving an additional point is not awarded. We have improved our scores in three categories compared with last year's report.

2.4 In the single category scoring 2 – achievement - this acknowledges that our sound foundation work has not yet delivered improvements that are capable of being measured by performance indicators (PIs). PIs are evaluated annually as at 31 March and are published later the following year after the conclusion of an independent external audit. The 2004/5 PIs (ie: as at 31 March 2005) are currently being compiled and will be audited during the autumn of 2005. The report recognises that the Council continues to focus on achieving improved service outcomes for users.

2.5 The Audit Commission report provides commentary for each of the nine categories. The table below attempts to summarise the overall flavour and key messages in each of the nine categories, using quotes from the Audit Commission's report.

CATEGORY	SCORE	QUOTES – ON OVERALL FLAVOUR
WHAT IS THE COUNCIL TRYING TO ACHIEVE?		
AMBITION Score last time: 3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This has continued to be a strength.²³ • The council has clear ambitions.²³ • Clear and visible leadership in the delivery of the council's vision and priorities.²⁸ • Community leadership role is still developing.²⁹
PRIORITISATION Score last time: 3	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council has significant strengths in prioritisation.³⁰ • Effective consultation and communication activity.³³ • Effective approach to balancing local and national priorities.³⁴ • Clear and improving resource allocation.³⁵
FOCUS Score last time: 3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intense focus on improving public services.³⁷ • Significant improvements in some priority services.³⁷ • Financial systems are effective and have focussed on the priorities of the council.⁴² • Some services have not improved.⁴⁴

HOW HAS THE COUNCIL SET ABOUT DELIVERING ITS PRIORITIES?		
CAPACITY Score last time: 3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good capacity with strong corporate management.⁴⁵ • Good staff morale with a “can do together” culture.⁴⁵ • Council uses a range of partnerships to enhance capacity.⁴⁹ • Some cultural issues to be addressed.⁵¹
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT Score last time: 2	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms introduced are effective and have led to improved management of performance.⁵⁵ • Risk management is becoming embedded.⁵⁷ • Effective financial monitoring.⁵⁷ • Evaluation of value for money is ... underdeveloped.⁵²

WHAT HAS THE COUNCIL ACHIEVED/NOT ACHIEVED TO DATE?		
ACHIEVEMENT OF IMPROVEMENT Score last time: 2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most services are getting better ... from a low base.⁶² • Massive improvement in ... services provided by the LEA.⁶⁹ • Public perception of ... improvement is not yet reflected in feedback.⁶³ • Plans for significant regeneration ... still being developed.⁷⁶
INVESTMENT Score last time: 4	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant strengths in the way it is investing in its future.⁷⁷ • The council looks proactively and systematically ... to improve services and enhance capacity.⁷⁸ • Investing in addressing key service weaknesses.⁸⁰ • The council is attracting investment.⁸¹

IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT THE COUNCIL HAS LEARNED - WHAT NEXT?		
LEARNING Score last time: 3	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are now significant strengths ... the Council is self-aware.⁸⁵ • Good development of the procurement function through joint work with other councils.⁸⁸ • Council has good learning tools.⁸⁹ • Organisational development function is capable and effective.⁹⁰
FUTURE PLANS Score last time: 3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Stop Shop planned as a single point of contact for the public.⁹⁵ • Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Drugs and Alcohol Action Team have a good joint strategy and delivery plan.⁹⁶ • Good equalities strategy.^{p23} • No overarching regeneration plan for the Borough.⁹⁷

Note: superscripted numbers refer to paragraph and page numbers

2.6 These scores are weighted by the Audit Commission according to their relative importance, as follows:

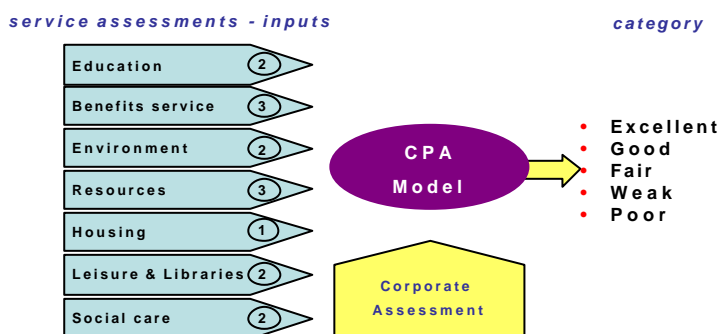
KEY QUESTION	THEME (Key Line of Enquiry)	SCORE (max = 4)	WEIGHT	W'TED POINTS
TRYING TO ACHIEVE	Ambition	3	1	3
	Prioritisation	4	1	4
	Focus	3	1	3
DELIVERING PRIORITIES	Capacity	3	1	3
	Performance Management	3	1	3
ACHIEVED TO DATE	Achievement	2	3	6
	Investment	4	2	8
LEARNING & WHAT NEXT	Learning	4	1	4
	Future Plans	3	1	3
TOTAL THEME SCORES				37

2.7 This total points score is converted by the Audit Commission into an overall score for “council ability” of between 1 and 4. 37 points converts to an overall score for Walsall MBC of “3”, as follows:

WEIGHTED POINTS	OVERALL SCORE
Less than 24 points	1
24 to 35 points	2
36 – 39 points	3
40 – 48 points	4

3. CONTRIBUTION TO THE OVERALL CPA ASSESSMENT

3.1 The corporate assessment outcome makes a significant contribution to the overall CPA categorisation, as illustrated in the model below. The service scores are a combination of inspection, performance indicators and auditors scored judgements.



- 3.2 Councils are also awarded an overall points score for their core services, although the cut offs for each category are different to those for the corporate assessment/council ability. Assessment is made using a combination of inspection outcomes, assessments of strategy plans and the most recently published annual performance indicators available at the date of each inspection. Walsall MBC's current scores for services increased by 7 points over last year and are as follows:

ASSESSMENTS	ASSESSMENT METHOD	DATE (insptn)	SCORE	WEIGHT	W'TED POINTS
Education	OFSTED	Oct 04	3	4	12
Benefits	BF inspection	Apr 04	3	1	3
Environment	BV inspection/PI/ LTP Assessment	Nov 04	2	2	4
Resources	ASJ *①/PI/ Asset Mgt Plan Assessment	Dec 04	4	1	4
Housing	Inspection/PI/ Housing Strategy Assessment	Nov 04	2	2	4
Leisure & Libraries	Inspection/PI	Sep 03	2	1	2
Social Care	Childrens/adults inspections/PIs	Sep 04	2	4	8
OVERALL					37

* ① ASJ = auditors scored judgements

- 3.3 The total weighted points score converts into an overall services score of 2 (missing out on the next category by only one point) as follows:

CORE SERVICE SCORE	OVERALL SCORE
Less than 30 points	1
30 – 37 points	2
38 – 45 points	3
More than 45 points	4

- 3.4 The two scores are then combined together to give the council's overall CPA categorisation. Councils are given one of five categories: poor; weak; fair; good or excellent. Our combination of scores gives us an improved categorisation of "FAIR" as follows:

		Core Service Performance			
Council ability	Scores	1	2 (37)	3	4
	1	Poor	Poor	Weak	Fair
	2	Poor	Weak	Fair	Good
	3 (37)	Weak	Fair	Good	Excellent
	4	Fair	Good	Excellent	Excellent

- 3.5 In 2005/6 the CPA process changes substantially from that set out above.

4. IMPROVEMENT (ACTION) PLAN

- 4.1 A draft comprehensive action plan is being finalised. The final version will require approval by Cabinet at its first meeting of the new municipal year. The key themes (some of which are cross-cutting and/or are assessed under more than one of the corporate assessment report categories) within the draft improvement plan are:

OVERALL <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue intense focus on service improvement.• Embed development of community leadership role.• Develop overarching regeneration plan for the Borough.• Clarify member roles.
AMBITION <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalise WBSP community plan.• Embed the role of LNPs.
PRIORITISATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No major significant actions.
FOCUS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue with the focus on service improvement.• Embed member involvement in performance management.
CAPACITY <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarify some member roles.• Reduce use of non-permanent staff where possible.• Maximise work with the voluntary sector.• Address remaining cultural issues.
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop evaluation of value for money.• Introduce systematic performance management of SLAs.• Ensure wider understanding of the role of Beacon Index.
ACHIEVEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue focus on delivering service improvements measurable by both PIs and customer satisfaction.• Finalise overall regeneration plan for the Borough.
INVESTMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhance procurement function beyond its advisory role.• Identify medium term efficiencies.
LEARNING <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overcome remaining few pockets of resistance.
FUTURE PLANS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalise community plan.

- Finalise overarching regeneration plan.

4.2 The plan also picks up and includes those action items arising from the previous corporate assessment report, which are still ongoing.

5. PATH TO EXCELLENCE

5.1 The overall aim is to secure excellence in CPA terms by 2008. This requires a combination of scores/outcomes (both inspections and PIs) for services and corporate ability. There are restrictions on flexibility purely due to the timing of inspections and whether they count towards a particular annual assessment and because annual PIs are those as achieved on 31 March each year. This means that many of the component parts need to be in place before 2008 in order to achieve EXCELLENT in the December 2008 announcement. A diagram showing the various routes to excellence will appear in the improvement plan.

6. SUMMARY

6.1 The corporate assessment report demonstrates that the council's corporate arrangements are strong overall, representing a transformational change since the 2001 and further improvement since last year. An action plan building on the previous continuous improvement and modernisation plan will deliver the necessary improvements.