

ANNEX 5 – INSPECTIONS AND REVIEWS CARRIED OUT

Areas to be addressed through peer review & audit commission inspections

IDEA Peer review areas for attention

- **Consultation and Community engagement** - this has been recognised as an area for improvement in the Aiming for Excellence programme - work is being undertaken on a Community Engagement strategy and on improving our approach to consultation
- **Financial Management** - the Council are aware of the challenges here - whilst much has been done, there remains a need to continue to focus on improving our use of resources score and implementing the improvement plan
- **Customer care** - a need was identified to continue to improve in this area. Work is being done to implement the Customer Contact Strategy and to engage the champions in each service. This will need to be an area of continued focus in the improvement programme alongside improving the performance of the customer contact teams & call response times
- **Complaints** - again an area identified in the Aiming for Excellence programme which is being implemented. We need to put in place smarter capture, analysis & use of complaints & customer contact data to drive service improvement
- **Performance Management** - much good work has taken place to improve our approach and we are taking on board learning from other authorities. The Audit Commission have identified a number of areas for improvement and we will be delivering an action plan to make sure all these are addressed. This will include the possibility of purchasing a performance management IT system
- **Equality & diversity** – achieving level 2 of the Equality Standard by September 2008
- **Partnership improvement** – improving our approach to performance management in partnerships & getting ready for the new strategy, LAA & partnership structure
- **Communications** - there are new strategies in place and continued efforts need to be made to implement these to ensure the blocks to communication which had been identified are overcome.
- **Unitary Status** not being seen as an end in itself and not distracting from the Council's improvement journey. The team suggested that this work be risk assessed. This is happening and we are now proposing a two track approach focusing upon both the improvement agenda and Unitary
- **Staff development** - additional investment has been made in this area and we will continue to address this through the appraisal process and through corporate and specific directorate training programmes
- Making use of the **capacity of other sectors** e.g. VCS - this is a trend in Government policy and will become increasingly important if the authority achieves Unitary Status.
- **Member development** - the team were not sure that training was meeting the needs of all members. Some work has already been done with the Local Government and Improvement Unit and the Council has signed up to the Charter for Member Development which will ensure a more systematic approach to member development is in place.

There were several inspections carried out by the Audit Commission in the 2007/08 financial year. These were:

Culture

This review covered arts and culture, events, sports development and tourism. The Commission said that the service was good but that it had uncertain prospects for improvement.

Strengths of the service include

- The ability to deliver a programme of heritage and cultural events and of sports development that help to increase civic pride, facilitate an awareness of local heritage and to tackle deprivation and reduce inequalities
- Aims and objectives are linked to local need and regional and national priorities
- Key partnerships gain access to external funds enabling the delivery of a wide range of cost effective events and facilities that promote health and well being and a better quality of life
- The council has been successful in supporting voluntary and community groups to deliver cultural activities and facilities
- The council consistently earns external recognition of its achievements and contributions
- The service is focused and delivers against its objectives

Areas for improvement included

- Evaluating the impact the service has on tackling deprivation and improving quality of life and take up of services by excluded groups
- Improving corporate capacity in area such as financial management, procurement and policy support
- Achieving level 2 of the equality standard
- Putting knowledge management into place and effective information handling

Recommendations included

- Strengthening arrangements for consulting with and involving local people in the improvement and development of services and in particular with hard to reach groups
- Improving performance management of the service by benchmarking and developing local performance indicators which will help the service be able to demonstrate achievement of Value for Money
- Ensuring that corporate capacity is developed to support the service effectively & making use of cross cutting staff groups and managers to input and take part in strategic thinking, planning and use of innovation

Data Quality (Draft report only at this stage)

This review considered the quality of the data underlying the publication of performance information by the Council and its use in decision making. The review concluded that the Council's management arrangements were adequate for ensuring data quality (although these could be improved) and some improvements had been noted e.g. approval of a corporate data quality policy.

Recommendations included:

- To integrate data quality objectives and action plan monitoring in departmental service plans
- To identify the risks associated with poor data quality and include them in the risk register where appropriate
- To carry out data quality awareness training for all staff as part of ongoing training
- To raise member awareness of data quality by providing specific training
- To carry out a gap analysis of data quality arrangements, including adequacy of procedure notes and guidance, across the councils business areas & address
- To enhance the policy to incorporate national standards & requirements
- Put arrangements in place to review all business critical systems annually & put in place action plans
- Identify all data sharing arrangements and have a corporate protocol about the sharing of data between partners and get agreements in place for data streams
- Agree an annual programme of reviews of performance and financial data based on risk – so systems & processes operate right first time
- Define roles and responsibilities in relation to data quality

Performance Management (Draft report only at this stage)

Strengths include

- Shared ambitions are in place
- The council is increasing capacity in this area and has taken positive steps to identify performance management weaknesses and to put in the improvements needed
- Corporate planning arrangements are improving
- Service planning is improving
- Piloting of neighbourhood management approaches is positive
- Partnership working is strong in the city

Areas for improvement include

- The “golden thread” does not run consistently through all plans and appraisals
- Service plans lack robust financial info and VFM targets
- The Council places an over-reliance on national PI's
- Need more robust reporting of performance
- Benchmarking needs to be better utilised
- Partnership performance management needs to be a priority
- Target setting has been weak
- Need to monitor implementation of inspection recommendations
- Management of corporate projects has been weak and there needs to be in place post implementation reviews
- The speed of improvement needs to increase

Recommendations

- Enhance the performance management framework
- Put in place smarter capture, analysis and use of complaints & customer contact data to drive service improvement

Norwich Connect

This review considered the performance management of the Norwich Connect PFI and how learning is being applied to enhance the working of the contract.

Strengths include

- Improved customer access in the city with a single point of access for most customer enquiries and service requests being resolved at the first point of contact
- Improved customer focus
- Significant revenue savings achieved
- Some services are now more efficient and responsive
- Improved systems
- Sound governance arrangements are in place and the contract operates as an effective partnership
- Internal communications have improved as a result of the use of ICT

Areas for improvement include

- Value for Money of the contract needs to be tested (this is underway)
- Call response was variable with some targets not being achieved
- Member involvement is limited
- staff concern about the contract
- Customer engagement has been limited
- Customer perception of service delivery is poor
- Performance management was not consistently effective across the Council

Recommendations

- Develop a user engagement strategy to enable users to influence the design of customer contact
- Enhance the capacity of the customer contact centre
- Ensure effective member scrutiny and performance management of the Norwich Connect Project
- Introduce systematic learning mechanisms which ensure key lessons and good practice are spread throughout the Council
- Develop permanent disaster recovery arrangements for the customer contact centre

Annual governance review

In addition the Commission undertake an annual audit and inspection and a review of governance arrangements and key messages from this are set out below:

Strengths include

- The Council has introduced a range of initiatives strategies and policies designed to secure continuous improvement
- PMIB has given a greater focus on performance, and capacity is strengthening
- The councils positive approach to partnership working continues with a clear focus upon priority areas
- Early initiatives in neighbourhood working have proved positive and are improving the quality of life for some local residents
- Some positive outcomes for local people through delivery of political priorities
- Customer access is a clear priority and much has been put in place but this needs to remain an area of focus
- Positive approach to diversity but need to achieve level 2 of equality standard by September 2008
- Improvements in performance in voids, DC, rent and council tax collection
- Steps taken to enhance capacity should strengthen the councils ability to deliver its priorities

Areas for improvement include

- Council has continued to face a number of significant challenges
- Council has made limited progress in improving services & is not keeping pace with improvement in other councils
- Need to improve use of resources but recognition of the steps taken to improve
- 2007 financial statements were of a poor standard
- Failed to meet a number of VFM criteria
- Need to improve data quality
- Speed of improvement needs to increase

The annual governance report makes a number of detailed recommendations in relation to the audit of the financial statements. These are being picked up through the work on use of resources and the financial improvement plan and implementation will be overseen by the audit committee.