

Report of	Meeting	Date
Chief Executive	Executive Cabinet Overview and Scrutiny Committee	29 September 2005 and 13 October 2005

## PROGRESS ASSESSMENT REPORT

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To enable the Executive Cabinet to consider a "Progress Assessment Report" from the Audit Commission received in July.

### CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- The subject matter within the Progress Assessment report potentially affects all the Council's key corporate facilities.

### RISK ISSUES

- The issues raised in the Progress Assessment Report (but not the recommendation made in this report) involve risk considerations in the following categories:

Strategy	x	Information	
Reputation	x	Regulatory/Legal	
Financial	x	Operational	
People	x	Other	

- The risks relate to all aspects of the implementation of the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan arising out of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

### BACKGROUND

- Council Councils and Metropolitan and Unitary Authorities have been receiving an annual re-inspection following their CPAs. These have allowed an assessment of their progress to be made and a re-categorisation of authorities where that is justified. A large number of the authorities have been raised into a higher category and some have even achieved two rises, a significant number achieving "Excellent".
- However the same facility has not been accorded to District Councils in two-tier areas. Many District Authorities, including Chorley, have worked hard on improvement plans following their CPAs and are looking for some recognition of the progress they have made. From the end of this year, all District Councils will undergo a short process of assessment, with a report on progress, culminating in a judgement on the extent of improvement, although without any "score" or categorisation.
- The process has however been piloted in the Northwest and we went through it at the turn of the year. It falls considerably short of a CPA inspection and consists basically of a desk- top study of documents and one day on-site by an inspector interviewing relevant

people. The outcome is a short report, originally intended to be referred to as “Direction of Travel” but in fact issued under a “Progress Assessment Report” label. The report issued under the pilot process however differs from the reports to be issued under the definitive progress assessment process in one respect. The pilot process reports do not conclude with a qualitative judgement of the extent of progress achieved.

## **THE REPORT**

8. Our report was issued in July 2005. A copy of the full report is attached. Its principal messages are:

- The Council has a positive attitude towards achieving improvement for local people
- The Best Value Indicators show that real improvement is taking place
- The programme is ambitious and challenging but we are currently well placed to meet the challenges

9. The report specifically recognises a number of particular achievements:

- The work on the new Community Strategy through the Chorley Partnership
- The redirection of savings from non-priority to priority services in the 2004/05 budget
- E-Government progress
- Area Forum Pilots
- Communications improvements
- More pro-active Overview and Scrutiny
- Improved Human Resources and Staff Consultation
- Improving Performance Management
- Sickness absence reduction
- The Shared Service Contact Centre
- Improved Development Control performance
- The work on Housing Stock Options
- Continued Investment in a Greener, Cleaner, Safer, Chorley
- More positive staff attitudes in the Optima Survey of March/April 2004.
- Staff appraisals and a performance and competency culture
- The Improve4U initiative (this is an improvement-directed mechanism at officer level, whereby senior managers and staff at all levels work together to introduce improvements in a range of specific areas)

10. The report recognises the following as areas for continued attention:

- Monitoring improvement progress
- Converting the new Community Strategy into a Council Corporate Plan
- Monitoring progress against the objectives of the new Corporate Plan
- Member Training and Development
- Equalities and Diversity
- Business Planning
- Performance Management – the revised Performance Management Framework.

## **COMMENTS**

11. While pointing out the areas for continued attention, which is helpful, the report gives recognition to the considerable number of improvements that have been achieved. It is of course disappointing that, unlike the position in the forthcoming new round of Progress

Assessments, there is no specific judgement made about the Council's overall improvement. The report also suffers from the disadvantage that when issued, it was addressing a situation that was then six months in the past and we had in the intervening period progressed considerably further, as the report on the Customer Access and Focus Inspection presented to the last meeting of the Executive Cabinet shows.

12. All the areas flagged up for continued attention are being actively addressed, with one exception. The exception is the monitoring of progress against the objectives of the new Council Corporate Plan. That Plan is still being developed and, clearly, progress against the objectives within it cannot be monitored until the Plan comes into operation, which was always programmed for 1 April 2006. The work to achieve that is on schedule.

#### **THE FUTURE OF CPA**

13. A consultation paper on the future of CPA for District Councils has recently been issued. This is currently being digested and will be reported on at future meetings.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

14. The Executive Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the July 2005 Progress Assessment Report.

J W DAVIES  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

There are no background papers to this report.

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Chief Executive	5104	21 September 2005	EXECREP/Progress Assessment