

Committee: Performance Select

Agenda Item

Date: 24 June 2008

11

Title: Access to Services Inspection Action Plan

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Item for decision

Summary

1. In August 2007, the Committee agreed an action plan for delivering recommendations contained in the Audit Commission's Access to Services inspection of the Council. The inspection looked at all aspects of access, from the way the council offers services to the public to physical access to its buildings and the report, published in July 2007, rated the service as fair, with promising prospects for improvement.
2. Steps have been taken to seek to implement the main recommendations contained in the report, but progress in some areas has been affected by the issues that have faced the Council in recent months. As a result, actions (including implementation dates) have been reviewed.
3. The action plan also sought to deal with other issues that were mentioned in the report, but which did not merit a formal recommendation. Given the reduced resources now available to the Council, it is extremely unlikely that a number of the areas mentioned in the report (but not forming part of the formal recommendations) could be achieved in the short to medium term, without taking resources away from key service delivery areas. A more realistic view has been taken of the importance of these proposals and the capacity available to deal with them.

Recommendations

4. That the Committee:
 - a. Notes the action taken to date on the recommendations contained in the Audit Commission's report;
 - b. Agrees the proposals for taking forward these actions; and
 - c. Notes and endorses the comments in relation to the other areas covered in the Action Plan.

Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author.

- Audit Commission Access to Services inspection report, available on [www. Audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.Audit-commission.gov.uk)

Impact

6.

Communication/Consultation	Appropriate internal and external communication on the changes the authority will make in terms of improving access to services.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	Improving access to services will have a positive impact in terms of ensuring fair and equal access for all sections of the community
Finance	The majority of actions now proposed can be met from existing budgets
Human Rights	None specific
Legal implications	None
Sustainability	Improved access such as redesigned website and contact points at district libraries greater contact has the potential to cut the number of car journeys to the Saffron Walden offices
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	Working patterns for some staff may change as the result of the continued move towards a more customer-focused operation, particularly with regard to more services moving into the Customer Service Centre

Situation

7. Two Audit Commission inspectors spent a week on site in June 2007, looking at the way Uttlesford District Council's customers gain access to its services. The week-long inspection was preceded by a day of site visits, during which time they saw access points including the UConnect Customer Service Centre, museum and Lord Butler Leisure Centre. During the inspection week, they interviewed dozens of officers, councillors and representatives from partner organisations.
8. The Audit Commission rated the Council fair with promising prospects for improvement.
9. The report detailed 11 recommendations, divided into three broad categories:
 - a. Develop deeper understanding of community and customer need to inform service design and delivery
 - b. Embed equality, diversity and cohesion into service planning, design and delivery
 - c. Improve the customer experience of services
10. The attached action plan gives details of the current position in relation to these recommendations. Implementation dates have been reviewed to take account of Council priorities and the reduced capacity now available to the Council. The appendix provides a realistic view of the current situation and the ability to take forward the actions within a reasonable timescale.
11. The original action plan also sought to deal with other issues that were mentioned in the report, but which did not merit a formal recommendation. Again, the situation has been reviewed in the light of current circumstances. It is extremely unlikely that a number of these areas could be achieved in the short to medium term, without taking resources away from key service delivery areas.
12. In the circumstances, a view has been taken of the importance of these proposals to the Council and local people who access services and the capacity available to deal with them.

Risk Analysis

13.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Council does not have the capacity or resources to fulfil the recommendations contained in this	2	2	A realistic view has been taken of the resources available to the Council and prioritisation and management of

report.			work will reduce likelihood of further slippage
Customer experience suffers if recommendations are not acted upon	1	2	Customer focus is a key aim of the authority.
Reputation of Council will suffer if it is not seen to deliver the key recommendations intended to benefit users	1	2	Key milestones will be publicised to demonstrate how work is progressing

- *1 = Little or no risk or impact*
- *2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary,*
- *3 = Significant risk or impact – action required*
- *4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.*