

Committee: Performance Select

Agenda Item

Date: 13 November 2008

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Title: Access to Services – Action Plan

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Item for decision

Summary

1. At its meeting on 24 May 2008, the Committee received a report on progress in implementing the recommendations that came out of the Audit Commission's report on access to services, published in July 2007. The committee requested an updating report at this meeting.
2. It is important that actions emanating from the inspection report are now seen to have been subsumed into the 'day to day' running of the Council, where appropriate, rather than as separate issues standing outside the Council's corporate focus. This approach has now been adopted.
3. The key actions identified by the Council in response to recommendations in the report are now being picked up through the short term recovery plan, which is being overseen by the Voluntary Improvement Board, and are a key element of the current exercise under which the council is reviewing its corporate plan and re-assessing its priorities from 2009 onwards.
4. This report identifies the progress that has been made, both in relation to the three main recommendations in the inspection report and to 'other actions' that were identified by the Council itself and which fit in with the council's current priorities

Recommendations

5. That the Committee:
 - a) Notes the action taken to date and the steps taken to incorporate actions into the Council's corporate priorities, as appropriate; and
 - b) Requests a further report in due course on any issues relating to the report which emanate from the Audit Commission's forthcoming assessment of the Council's direction of travel.

Background Papers

6. 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

Impact

- 7.

Communication/Consultation	Appropriate internal and external communication on the progress being made in implementing the actions taken.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	Improving access to services and achieving Equality Standard Level 2 will have a positive impact in terms of ensuring fair and equal access for all sections of the community.
Finance	The majority of actions are either being met from existing budgets or from external funding, for which the Council is making bids as appropriate.
Human Rights	None specific
Legal implications	None
Sustainability	Improved access has the potential to cut the number of car journeys to the Saffron Walden offices.
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	There may be some changes in working patterns as a result of the continued move towards a more customer-focused operation.

Situation

8. This Committee agreed an action plan in August 2007 to address issues raised in the Audit Commission's report, published in July 2007. The report followed an inspection which looked at all aspects of access, from the way that the council offers services to the public through to physical access to its buildings. The report rated the service as 'fair' (one star), with promising prospects for improvement.
9. At its meeting on 24 May 2008, the Committee received a report on progress in implementing the recommendations. The action plan prepared immediately following the inspection not only dealt with the main recommendations but also sought to deal with other issues raised in the report, even though they were not the subject of specific recommendations.
10. The committee requested an updating report at this meeting.
11. Given that it is now over 12 months since the report was published, it is important that, at this stage, actions emanating from the inspection report are seen to have been subsumed into the 'day to day' running of the

council, rather than as standing separately, outside the council's corporate focus. This has happened.

12. The key actions identified by the Council in response to recommendations in the report are now being picked up through the short term recovery plan, which is being overseen by the Voluntary Improvement Board, and are also a key element of the current exercise under which the Council is reviewing its corporate plan and re-assessing its priorities from 2009 onwards.

13. Details are set out below, using the three key recommendations from the report (*R1 etc*)

14. *R1 – develop a deeper understanding of community and customer need to inform service design and delivery*

- Progress is being made through work on diversity and equalities. The officer working group on equalities is sourcing access to the relevant information, which will be fed into divisional plans and used in developing services.
- Customer feedback is being developed and is one of the key priorities in the short term recovery plan.
- The revised Sustainable Community Strategy includes issues of rurality.

R2 – embed equality, diversity and cohesion into service planning

- The short term recovery plan identifies this as a top priority. The current objective is to reach equality standard Level 2 by the end of 2008 and good progress is being made, through the officer working group.

R3 – improve customer experience of services

- As mentioned under *R1* above, customer service has been identified as a key priority in the short term recovery plan, as indeed it is in the corporate plan.

14. The other issues covered in the Council's action plan (but not specifically identified within the three recommendations mentioned above) continue to be processed, where they align with the council's priorities. Examples of action taken include:

- New area governance arrangements
- Redesign of the council's website
- Improve signage at reception
- Monitoring of customer satisfaction levels
- Review of the procurement strategy

15. Elements of the access to services report are also linked to the Commission's report on housing strategy. The committee received a report on progress in implementing that action plan at its last meeting. Where appropriate, actions relating to the reports which are linked are being picked up as part of the corporate focus referred to in this report.

16. The Council's progress in responding to the report will presumably form part of the forthcoming 'direction of travel' review by the Audit Commission and it is suggested that any specific feedback is reported back to this committee.

Risk Analysis

17.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Customer experience suffers if recommendations are not acted upon	2 At least in the short term, resources may not permit swift adoption of all the recommendations.	2 Customer satisfaction levels would not improve as quickly as desired.	A realistic view has been taken of the resources available to the Council. Prioritisation and management of work will reduce likelihood of further slippage
Reputation of Council will suffer if it is not seen to deliver the key recommendations intended to benefit users	2 At least in the short term, resources may not permit swift adoption of all the recommendations.	2 Customer satisfaction levels would not improve as quickly as desired.	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.