

REPORT

Cllr John Collier, Deputy Leader of the Council

AUDIT COMMISSION CONSULTATION – COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

1. Purpose of Report::

To seek Cabinet approval for the Council's response to the Audit Commission's consultation on the future approach to Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

2. Background:

- 2.1 CPA was first introduced by the Audit Commission in December 2002. It measures how well councils are delivering services for local people.
- 2.2 Salisbury District Council's first CPA took place in January 2004. Following this inspection the Audit Commission rated the Council as "Good".
- 2.3 The Audit Commission are now proposing changes to the CPA and are inviting councils to respond to consultation. A full copy of the consultation document is in the Members Room and is available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk. This paper provides a draft response for Cabinet consideration.

3. Brief Overview of Main Changes to CPA:

- 3.1 Cabinet will recall that CPA included a corporate assessment, specific service reviews of housing, community safety and the environment as well as a financial assessment.
- 3.2 The corporate assessment will remain. It will be undertaken again here when we wish to apply for a reclassification (this would need to be following a minimum of 2 years strong improvement). The specific service reviews and a 'use of resources' judgement will be assessed annually.
- 3.3 The main changes to the corporate assessment will be:
 - An explicit judgement of the quality and impact of the Council's efforts to promote user focus and diversity (including tackling deprivation and rural issues);
 - An assessment of how well the Council contributes to the achievement of shared priorities between local and central government;
 - An explicit consideration of management of resources and value for money;
 - An assessment of the performance of the Council in leading and influencing communities, local partnerships with other agencies, with a focus on what difference councils are making to local plans and people.

- 3.4 The service specific areas to be assessed in future CPAs will be Housing; Benefits; Environment; Culture and Community Safety.
- 3.5 The 'use of resources' judgement will be a prominent element of the new CPA. It will offer stronger judgements on financial planning and management, internal controls and financial standing. It will also provide a value for money judgement drawing on a self assessment by the Council.
- 3.6 The Audit Commission also proposes introducing a 'direction of travel' statement which would describe progress on improvement.

4. Consultation Issues and Proposed Responses:

4.1 Overall Categories

The Council does not support the proposal to reduce the number of overall categories from 5 (excellent, good, fair, weak and poor) to 4 (through merging weak and poor). The Council believes that reducing the categories would be confusing to those familiar with the present categories and reduce the opportunity for achieving milestones on the road to excellence.

4.2 Scoring and Rules

The Council supports the scoring of individual themes on the basis of:
4 = performing strongly; 3 = performing well; 2 = adequate performance; 1 = inadequate performance
and the rules for determining the overall CPA category.

The Council also supports the annual performance assessment of key service areas and would welcome an individual service score.

4.3 Direction of Travel Statements

The Council agrees with the introduction of 'direction of travel statements' and supports the descriptions of progress of improvement (progressing strongly, progressing well, making only limited progress and falling behind).

4.4 Performance Information

The Council agrees that there is scope to improve the way in which performance information is used. In particular the Council has been frustrated by the use of data that is out of date and the lack of recognition for improvement in performance.

The Council would welcome working with the Audit Commission to introduce a revised approach to performance information which is meaningful to customers, stakeholders and the Council. If this is to be achieved then the Council believes that the Audit Commission will need to work with all relevant government departments and professional organisations to ensure that a "joined up" solution is agreed and implemented. It will also be important to ensure that consultation takes place across all tiers of local government when performance criteria cut across types of authority e.g. the supporting people assessment.

The success of any future approach will hinge on the meaningfulness of the information and the relative ease of collection by authorities. We would welcome the inclusion of user and resident satisfaction information.

4.5 Integrating Corporate Assessments and Joint Area Reviews

Whilst not a Unitary or County Council with direct responsibility for children's services, the Council is mindful of the important services it does provide to children and young people. With this in mind, the Council would welcome the Audit Commission's recognition of the role of districts in 2 tier areas.

The Council fully supports any work that reduces the inspection burden on councils and trusts that this will be the case if Joint Area Reviews are held at the same time as corporate assessments.

5. Implications for Salisbury District Council:

- 5.1 The Audit Commission intend to publish the final approach to CPA in May 2005. Following receipt of this, a further report will be prepared for Cabinet on proposed preparations for the next CPA.
- 5.2 In the event of the final approach mirroring the consultation draft it would be timely for Salisbury District Council to consider:
- Undertaking a Best Value Review on rural issues, incorporating a 'value for money' methodology in all major reports, expanding our definition of capacity building, further developing work on diversity and performance management, developing a model to evaluate partnerships, incorporating an annual improvement plan in our Corporate Plan and considering a future voluntary Peer Review.

6. Recommendations:

Cabinet is asked to consider the proposed response to the Audit Commission's consultation and agree the Council's submission for return by 15th February 2005.

7. Background Papers:

Audit Commission – Proposals for CPA for 2005; SDC – Various Cabinet reports on CPA.

8. Implications:

- **Financial** : None at this stage.
- **Legal** : None at this stage.
- **Human Rights** : None at this stage.
- **Personnel** : Contained within CPA assessment methodology.
- **Community Safety** : Contained within CPA assessment methodology.
- **Environmental** : Contained within CPA assessment methodology.
- **Wards Affected** : All.
- **Consultation Undertaken:** CPA Officer Working Group, Deputy Leader, Chief Executive.