

TITLE:	AUDIT COMMISSION PROGRESS ASSESSMENT	
TO/ON:	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY	20 MARCH 2006
	THE CABINET	29 MARCH 2006
BY:	ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE	
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL	
STATUS:	FOR PUBLICATION	

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To present the Audit Commission's Progress Assessment Report on Rossendale Borough Council with its view that Rossendale borough Council is progressing well and highlight areas for further development by the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Progress Assessment Report be accepted.

2.2 That work take place during 2006-09 on the following issues, with further reports brought to Elected Members as appropriate:

- Community engagement
- Community leadership
- Skills development for Councillors and Officers to support Rossendale's capacity building model.
- Asset Management and Capital Investment
- Continued work on embedding the customer service ethos and performance management.

3. REPORT AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS AND TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 As part of the ongoing development of the Comprehensive performance Assessment (CPA) system the Audit Commission undertakes an annual Progress Assessment Review (PAR). The intention of this process is to allow

Councils and citizens to understand the rate of progress within the organisation and how far it still has to travel to achieve excellence.

3.2 At its meeting on 7 December 2005, Cabinet considered a report which highlighted the fact that the PAR is part of a range of work by the Audit Commission leading up to the Council's next full CPA under the new 'harder test' methodology. This programme covers:

- Use of Resources/Value for Money – a new annual assessment process which is currently underway.
- Follow up to previous work in relation to financial management and performance management.
- Annual Progress Assessment Review
- Inspection of Environmental Services (February 2006)
- Annual Audit and Inspection Letter (scheduled for March 2006). This summarises all the work undertaken by the Commission during 2005/06.
- Inspection of Strategic Housing Function (likely to be in December 2006). This will focus on how well the Council has adapted to its changed role in relation to housing following the completion Stock Transfer process.
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment – while a date has not been formally set for this it is hoped that it will be carried out during the last quarter of 2006.

3.3 The report also set out the Council's self-assessment which detailed the progress made in the last 12 months and, equally importantly, what we plan to do next. The self-assessment was then submitted to the Audit Commission and the Progress Assessment Review carried out.

3.4 We have now received the final report from the Audit Commission and a copy is appended. This is a positive report, with the overall conclusion that Rossendale BC is progressing well, with much improved political and officer leadership and is an organisation characterised by a more positive approach.

3.5 Key findings from the report include:

- Rossendale BC is an ambitious council with good plans for the future, and knows what it needs to do next to improve, following priorities which have broad cross-party ownership, are supported by staff and reflect local people's concerns.
- Increased retail investment as a result of town centre regeneration in Rawtenstall and evidence that the council is supporting jobs and investment in the borough.

- Good progress on improving housing with plans for the transfer of Council housing to Green Vale Homes and visible improvements in private sector housing brought about by the Housing Market Renewal programme.
- Environmental improvements with new neighbourhood environmental teams in four towns across the borough, a doubling of recycling, and plans to introduce cardboard recycling.
- Significant improvements in planning and housing and the council tax benefits services.
- Improved efficiency
- Positive staff morale with a perception that the Council is improving.
- More than half of the Council's performance measures improving in the last year and more than a quarter now amongst the best in the country.
- Good partnership working for example Council support to deliver health improvement schemes and cut crime in the borough.
- A council with a very positive approach to learning from others that is committed to a learning culture which will continue to sustain service improvements.

3.6 This report reflects the hard work, energy and commitment of councillors, staff and partners.

3.7 The PAR is helpful as it confirms the areas the Council has identified as areas for further development. In some of these areas work is already underway or relates to embedding existing work, whilst in others thinking is still at an early stage.

The main areas are:

- Community engagement
- Community leadership
- Skills development for Councillors and Officers to support Rossendale's capacity building model.
- Asset Management and Capital Investment
- Continued work on embedding the customer service ethos and performance management.

4. CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES

4.1. FINANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT

The PAR recognises improvements in the Council's financial standing and the way in which risk management has been embraced.

4.2. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS

The impact of the new decision making processes are recognised within the report as well as the good progress made on Elected Member Development.

4.3. **HUMAN RESOURCES**

The PAR recognises the introduction of the Human Resources Strategy and that targeted training is helping to support succession planning and staff development is a clear priority. A critical aspect of the improvement journey to date and of the Council's future journey is the ability to secure and deploy appropriate skills to address the issues that the Council faces.

5. **ANY OTHER RELEVANT CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

There are no specific issues arising from the report.

6. **RISK**

As identified in the report the approach to risk management is improving and is central to the journey on which the Council is engaged.

7. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE REPORT**

There are no specific legal issues arising from the report.

8. **EQUALITIES ISSUES ARISING FROM THE REPORT**

There are no specific equalities issues arising from this report.

9. **WARDS AFFECTED**

All

10. **CONSULTATIONS**

Local Strategic Partnership

11. **Background documents:**

**Cabinet Report 7 December 2006
Self Assessment**

For further information on the details of this report, please contact:

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