



## OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

13 October 2004

**AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION OF  
ACCESS TO SERVICES**

**Jan Richmond  
Assistant Chief Executive (Performance and Policy)**

### Summary

1. To provide the Members of the OSB with the opportunity to consider the "access to services" inspection report from the Audit Commission and to agree the associated action plan.

### Introduction

2. In June 2004 the Audit Commission undertook an Access to Services inspection. This inspection was wide ranging and cut across all areas of the Council's service delivery.
3. Middlesbrough Council received its highest Audit Commission inspection score, "good service" and "promising" prospects for improvement, for this inspection.

### Evidence/ Discussion

4. The inspection process included:-
  - a review of the self-assessment and supporting evidence provided by the Council
  - visits to several of the council's facilities
  - using the council's website
  - telephone calls to the call centre and other offices

- speaking to users of the council's facilities (interviews with members of the public – selected at random)
  - interviews and focus groups – including with representatives from partner organisations
5. The inspectors found that Middlesbrough Council provides a 'good' service with 'promising' prospects for improvement. Specific strengths that the Inspectors found include:-
- the council has a good understanding of customer needs and is endeavouring to provide services in line with these
  - service plans are clearly customer focused and include specific diversity action plans with measurable outcome focused targets
  - the main contact centre offers a modern pleasant environment, is easily accessible and provides efficient services
  - the council operates a range of outreach activities that improve the quality of life and the environment for the diverse needs of local people
  - there is a wide range of opportunities to access information and advice, including a variety of formats and some information in other languages
  - staff demonstrates a strong commitment to dealing with customers efficiently and have an understanding of the requirements for physical access to council facilities and services
  - the council is joining up with other partners such as the health services to ensure that services and information are easily available
  - access to services compares well when measured against similar public sector providers and best value performance indicators relating to access are improving
  - the council has demonstrated strong leadership within the community and willingness to improve access to services
  - the council has turned around poor performance regarding access in response to internal and external research and findings
  - the council has focused on improving corporate capacity by introducing additional strategic managements resource within ICT, human resources, communications and partnership management
  - the council provides comprehensive induction training to all new councillors to enable them to deal with enquiries from the public
  - the council has integrated its approach to continuous improvement through information sharing and partnership working with other agencies and benchmarking and learning from others
6. There were some recommendations for improvement and an action plan has been developed to address these, see Appendix A.

## **Conclusion**

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