

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

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PROGRESS AGAINST CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PLANS

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to:

- Update Scrutiny regarding the progress that the Council has made in implementing improvement plans arising from the:
 - Access to Services Inspection
 - Cultural Services Inspection
 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment Corporate Assessment
 - Risk Management internal progress review
- seek comments from Scrutiny regarding the mainstreaming of outstanding actions into council plans.

Introduction

2. During 2004/05 the Audit Commission undertook three inspections at Middlesbrough Council, these were:
 - Access to Services (April 2004)
 - Cultural Services (July 2004)
 - Corporate Assessment (January – April 2005).
3. In each of the above inspections Middlesbrough Council scored well and the auditors found many strengths. However some areas for improvement were also identified. Improvement plans to address the areas for improvement identified were drafted and taken to CMT, Scrutiny and Executive.
4. In addition to the improvement work identified from external sources, the Council also identified risk management as an area that needed progressing and a revised risk management strategy and associated action plan was produced.
5. This report provides an update of progress against the four improvement plans listed in paragraph 1 and information regarding how any actions not yet achieved or of an on-going nature will be mainstreamed into other council plans.

Evidence / Discussion

6. Significant progress has been made in implementing the actions contained within the four improvement plans. An overview of progress made and actions still remaining, for each improvement plan, is given below. Full details of progress made and how outstanding actions will be mainstreamed into other council documents is shown in Appendix A.

Access to Services

7. The Access to Services Improvement Plan included eighteen actions; sixteen of these have been completed. Achievements to date include:
- introduction of Prestige Network a telephone interpretation service across the Council
 - development of an electronic corporate complaints system
 - achievement of Level 2 of the Equality Standard
 - development and agreement of a programme to prioritise resources available to tackle access issues. Resources have been identified for the first phase of the project and the resources required for phases 2 and 3 are being considered within the Medium Term Financial Plan.
8. The two actions still outstanding are:
- develop a minimum standard for customer care
 - undertake research to identify the needs of Middlesbrough residents regarding overcoming barriers to accessibility.
9. A draft minimum standard for customer care is currently available and has been circulated for consultation with key members of staff. The actions required to complete this work are included within the People Strategy (action 2.4).
10. Research into the needs of Middlesbrough residents has been undertaken, however it was decided to utilise the Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Survey to complement this work and this has resulted in a delay in reporting the outcomes of this research.

Cultural Services

11. The Cultural Services Improvement Plan included nine actions of which five have been completed, one action is dependant upon a national exercise and three will be mainstreamed into the 2006-07 Regeneration Service Plan. Achievements to date include:
- identification of the high level vision for cultural within the revised Community Strategy
 - range of cultural strategies and action plans harmonised through the overarching Cultural Strategy
 - cultural services access issues have been considered and contained within the Council's overall Access Strategy.

Corporate Assessment

12. The Corporate Assessment Improvement Plan is the most recent improvement plan and many of the actions contained within it include completion dates of March or September 2006. Nonetheless progress has already been made with fourteen actions already completed. Achievements to date include:

- reduced absence from work due to sickness from 15.2 days per FTE in 2003/04 to 11.8 days per FTE in 2004/05
- improved performance in BVPIs relating to staff in under-represented groups e.g. increased the percentage of the top 5% of earners that are women, increased the percentage of employees who are from a minority ethnic background, increased the percentage of staff who are disabled
- improved educational attainment at all key stages but with a step change of approximately 5% improvement in GCSE results
- improved risk management within Middlesbrough Council in the 2005 Auditors Scored Judgements this was listed as a strength.

13. The outstanding actions in the Corporate Assessment Improvement Plan are all contained within the revised People Strategy. Therefore it is suggested that future progress is monitored through the People Strategy review process.

Risk Management

14. The risk management action plan consisted of 21 actions; 16 of these have been completed, three actions are no longer applicable as they have been included within the Performance Management Minimum Standard and two actions required further work. Achievements to date include:
- introduced a revised Risk Management Strategy
 - introduced a revised Strategic Risk Register that is aligned to the Council's priorities
 - provided training for all members, senior officers and risk champions
 - incorporated risk management reporting within the Integrated Performance and Budget clinics
 - raised awareness of risk management with all staff through a series of newsletter articles.
15. The two actions which require further work are:
- establish terms of reference for the risk forum
 - develop a risk manual.
16. The risk forum has been established and draft terms of reference circulated. However, the focus of the risk forum has changed and therefore the terms of reference need revising. There has been significant progress on the key components of the risk manual. However, the likely timescale for completion of this document is April 2006. Both of these actions are included within the Central Services Group Plan.

Conclusion

That Scrutiny notes the report and comments on the mainstreaming of outstanding actions within other council documents.

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