

WIRRAL COUNCIL

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

31 MARCH 2009

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

ACCESS TO SERVICES – ACTION PLAN UPDATE

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates Members on the work being undertaken following the Audit Commission report on Access to Services presented in January 2009.
- 1.2 The inspection assessed Wirral Council (on a scale of zero to three stars) as providing 'good, two star access to services that has promising prospects for improvement.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Audit Commission undertook an inspection of Access to Services during September 2008. The context of the inspection was that:
 - Legislation requires that Council services are:
 - Responsive to the needs of citizens
 - Of a high quality and cost effective; and
 - Fair and accessible to all who need them
 - Access to services is a cross-cutting theme applicable to all Council services. An accessible and user-focused organisation places customers at the heart of service delivery and designs joined up-services around the needs of users
 - The customer experience for both citizens and businesses when contacting their local council should be one which is responsive, timely and efficient.
- 2.2. The Audit Commission assessment of the provision as a two star Access to Services with promising prospects for improvement has not been exceeded by any top tier local authority.

3 INSPECTION FINDINGS

- 3.1 The report, published on 8 January 2009 identified a number of service strengths as well as areas for ongoing improvement which were reported to this Committee on 26 January 2009.

- 3.2. To help the Council improve, inspectors recommended the Council should address three key recommendations:
- review the means of access across all services
 - strengthen the approach to accessibility and user-focus within the performance management arrangements.
 - consolidate existing plans for improving access within an overall strategy.
- 3.3 The Authority has produced an action plan to respond to these specific recommendations as well as continuing to build on the success of the many areas that were identified in the inspection. The updated position is shown as Appendix One. The action plan is regularly reviewed and updated and will form part of the review by the Audit Commission when they reassess how work has progressed since the formal inspection.
- 3.4. Members will note the linkages of this work to other key corporate initiatives such as the Council Change Programme approved by Cabinet on 10 December 2008, the Strategic Asset Review approved by Cabinet on 15 January 2009 and the ongoing development of the Customer Access Strategy. The management of the programme and ensuring integration of individual projects continue through the Corporate Improvement Group.

4. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

5. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

6. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

7. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

8. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. The Council, through its Customer Access Strategy, is committed to ensure that all customers can access services with ease.

9. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

10. **HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

10.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

11. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11.1. Access to Services Inspection – Audit Commission January 2009.

12. **RECOMMENDATION**

12.1. That the report be noted.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FNCE/71/09