

## **WIRRAL COUNCIL**

CABINET – 14 January 2010

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR OF  
CORPORATE SERVICES

### **Comprehensive Area Assessment 2009**

---

#### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA) and Organisational Assessments were published for the first time, 9 December 2009. The reports for Wirral are attached at appendices 1 and 2. Reports for all local areas are available on the One Place website, [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk). Green and red flags are part of the area assessment element of CAA; green flags are awarded for exceptional performance or innovation that others can learn from, and red flags for significant concerns where action is needed. Wirral was awarded no green flags and one red flag for safeguarding vulnerable adults.
- 1.2. In its Organisational Assessment, Wirral Council was scored 2 out of 4 overall. For both the Use of Resources and Managing Performance assessments, we were scored 2.
- 1.3. The report outlines the main findings of CAA, how Wirral compares with other Councils in the Liverpool City Region, and how the local authority, with partners, will seek to respond through its improvement planning processes.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1. CAA is a new way of assessing local public services in England. It examines how well councils are working in partnership to improve quality of life in their local area and has a strong focus on outcomes. It arises from April 2007, when Government commissioned the main public sector inspectorates including the Audit Commission, Care Quality Commission and Ofsted, to work together to develop and introduce a more joined up approach to inspection.
- 2.2. These are the first results published under the new framework. Assessments will be published every year and will provide local people with a snapshot of quality of life in their local area and what local service providers are doing to bring about improvement.

#### **3. Organisational Assessment for Wirral MBC**

- 3.1. Overall, Wirral was assessed as Level 2. The full Organisational Assessment report is attached at the appendices.

- 3.2. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessed adult social care services as performing well. However, the main concern of the Organisational Assessment was about the Council's safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable adults and its ability to address these concerns. Annual ratings of councils' Adult Social Services contribute significantly to the managing performance theme of CAA and to the overall organisational assessment score.
- 3.3. Annual ratings of councils' Children's services also contribute significantly to the managing performance theme and overall score for organisational assessment. In 2009, Children's services in Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council were judged to perform well.
- 3.4. The Council robustly contended its managing performance score on the grounds of:
- We did not believe that significant weight had been given to contributory assessments from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The Council had been rated as Performing Well by both
  - Progress made to address areas for improvement relating to Safeguarding adults had not been considered
  - Further significant improvements to performance since CPA, 2008 when we were found to be "improving well and demonstrating a 3 star overall performance"; 81% of National Indicators which could be compared had improved or maintained their performance levels
  - A deliberate focus on facilitating key regeneration developments and giving them the full consideration required rather than delivering decisions as quickly as possible in relation to major planning applications
  - Demonstrable improvements in improving our approach to equality and diversity
- 3.5. CAA guidance states that annual performance ratings for children's services and adult social care will carry significant weight and that the Audit Commission would have to justify giving a high managing performance theme score if for example evidence showed safeguarding arrangements or outcomes were inadequate. We believe, that the red flag given to safeguarding vulnerable adults resulted in a Level 2 managing performance score and ultimately in a Level 2 overall for Wirral MBC.
- 3.6. Had the Audit Commission accepted our arguments then we believe our Managing Performance score would have been 3, and based on what has been the case elsewhere in our region, our overall score would therefore also have been 3, Performing Well.

#### **4. Area Assessment**

- 4.1. CAA recognised that partners have a good understanding of the community and that the priorities for improvement reflect the main issues and problems of the area and the views of local people. The full Area Assessment is attached at the appendices.
- 4.2. Concerns about the Council's safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable adults and its ability to address these concerns were raised in the area assessment, resulting in a red flag.
- 4.3. The LSP contended the red flag for vulnerable adults on the grounds of:
  - The decision was not supported by the evidence
  - At no point had Wirral's safeguarding arrangements or outcomes been described by the inspectorate as inadequate or of significant concern. The CQC assessment determined that Adult Social Care is performing well
  - The CQC assessment acknowledged that the issues relating to safeguarding had been recognised and were being tackled
  - CQC had not raised concerns about Wirral's ability to address the areas for improvement
  - Plans put in place following Wirral's review of safeguarding adults in February 2009 had led to demonstrable improvement in the period between the CQC assessment and the final deadline for CAA

#### **5. Comparative Performance**

- 5.1. The Audit Commission has stated that CAA is a "harder test" and has warned against comparisons with the previous inspection regime, Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Under CAA, of the 36 Metropolitan authorities, 2 saw an improvement in their rating and 22 a reduction, including Wirral. Twelve remained the same. Nationally, just 14 councils received the maximum four out of four compared to 62 under CPA in 2008. A further 11 councils received the lowest score this year - one out of four. Last year under CPA no councils were awarded the lowest score, zero out of four. The vast majority of councils under CAA scored either three (185) or two (133) out of four.
- 5.2. Within our region, only St Helens were not given any red flags, Knowsley were given 2. One green flag was awarded to Liverpool City Council for Community Safety. Nationally, 62 red flags were handed out.

#### **6. Improvement Planning**

##### **6.1. Wirral MBC**

- 6.1.1. We are now preparing a detailed improvement plan in response to CAA. This will consist of many different strands, encompassed within the Corporate Plan and underpinned by detailed Departmental plans (the

Corporate and Departmental plans are contained elsewhere on this agenda). Priorities against each of the Council's strategic objectives have been reviewed and will form the bedrock of improvement activity. The Improvement Plan will be presented to a future meeting of Cabinet.

- 6.1.2. The Performance Management Framework is the basis for monitoring progress and this continues to be strengthened. The Audit Commission is currently undertaking a review of the Council's performance and financial management arrangements. The outcomes of the review, which concluded in December 2009, will be integral to any future improvement planning.
- 6.1.3. The Strategic Change Programme is addressing a number of projects; Strategic assets, Customer access, ICT, Common administrative processes, Building Schools for the Future programme and the Transformation of Adult Social Services in order to demonstrate value for money and to improve performance.
- 6.1.4. A review of Community Engagement is underway in order to determine a clear purpose for engagement that supports the Council's strategic objectives and to identify ways in which local people may get involved so they can influence decisions about their local area.
- 6.1.5. North West Employers will be working with us in the New Year to help us strengthen our Workforce Planning arrangements. There is much good practice across the Council and with partners but we recognise that in some areas workforce planning is less developed.

## **6.2. Local Strategic Partnership**

- 6.2.1. The Partnership is aware of the issues raised during CAA and will continue to prioritise areas for improvement and to monitor progress through the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement for Wirral. Government Office North West in its annual review of Wirral's LAA, 2009 praised the partnership working arrangements in place and the recent governance review has further strengthened arrangements by clarifying roles and responsibilities. Implementation of a Partnership Toolkit developed 2009 is underway.
- 6.2.2. Also during 2009, the LSP conducted a self evaluation that made a number of recommendations for improvement around:
  - The focus of the LSP Executive and Assembly
  - Learning
  - Members and the community
  - Good practice
  - Communication
  - Successes
  - Performance management framework
  - Financial and business planning

- 6.2.3. A number of improvements have been implemented already including strengthening risk management arrangements and a bigger, more specific focus on “narrowing the gap” in performance monitoring reports. Delivery plans are in place for each LAA improvement target. A recent review was undertaken of the plans to ensure that they fully reflect all partner activity and that they address any improvement areas highlighted by the Comprehensive Area Assessment process. The plans are managed and monitored by the relevant thematic partnership. The LSP Executive Board at its November meeting agreed that should an LAA improvement target under perform for **two** or more consecutive quarters then it be reported to the Board so that any further action that may be taken can be identified.
- 6.2.4. More detailed improvement planning will take place early in the New Year and will consider:
- LSP self evaluation
  - Review and refresh of the LAA
  - Four strands of the Comprehensive Engagement Strategy, adopted by the LSP Executive Board at its November meeting (Cohesive communities, Procurement and commissioning, Sharing best practice and Building capacity within the Third Sector)
  - Results of the Place Survey, 2008, elsewhere on the agenda
  - Outcomes of the CAA process

## **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1. There were considerable resources devoted to the CAA process, both within the Council and partner organisations, and this is likely to continue.

## **8. Staffing Implications**

- 8.1. No staffing implications arise directly from the CAA report however workforce planning is an important area of activity in order to improve performance and achieve efficiencies. The CAA process has placed significant demands upon existing staff within Corporate Policy and Performance, three of whom are on temporary, fixed term contracts. During 2010/11, the Council, and partners, will have to consider how to sustain the support required for CAA and the Local Strategic Partnership.

## **9. Equal Opportunities Implications**

- 9.1. No direct implications

## **10. Community Safety Implications**

- 10.1. Good practice and areas for further development are highlighted in the report.

## **11. Local Agenda 21 Implications**

11.1. Much good practice is highlighted in the report

## **12. Planning Implications**

12.1. The Organisational Assessment highlighted time taken to process major planning applications as a concern which will be addressed in future improvement activity.

## **13. Anti-poverty Implications**

13.1. Much of the improvement activity highlighted reflects the focus of CAA on outcomes for vulnerable people. The strategic and departmental plans of the Council and of partners also reflect this focus and particularly the emphasis on addressing inequality.

## **14. Social Inclusion Implications**

14.1. As above

## **15. Local Member Support Implications**

15.1. The report has implications across Wirral and across the LSP. More detailed improvement activity within local communities will develop as the improvement plan is delivered.

## **16. Background Papers**

## **17. Recommendations**

17.1 Cabinet notes the report and agrees that a more detailed Improvement Plan in response to CAA is presented to a future meeting of Cabinet.

J. WILKIE