

Statement in response to the Recommendations made in the Corporate Assessment issued in September 2013

Section 20 of the Local Government Measure 2009 requires local authorities to prepare a statement of actions and timescales that the authority will undertake as a result of the report

The Corporate Assessment contains six recommendations and the proposed actions to address these are set out below. The Corporate Assessment report also contained a further seven proposals for improvement and these will be addressed in a report to Cabinet in November, through our existing monitoring and reporting arrangements.

Recommendation 1

R1 The Council should ensure that members are provided with robust information at the earliest opportunity to enable them to inform, take and challenge choices and decisions effectively, and ensure that they are recorded and reported transparently. This includes the provision of:

- Options appraisals.

- The implications of the options, recommendations and decisions.

- Fully costed business cases prior to initiating major programmes to support change. The financial impact of any significant proposed service changes should be reflected in medium-term financial plans directly where the change is certain to proceed or as a sensitivity if the change is not certain.

Response 1

The Council's template for report writing by officers includes sections in which the report author is asked to identify, costs and financial implications; risks facing the proposals in the report; options available and; the reason for the preferred option.

All business cases in the change programme will have been fully costed and will be included in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the coming year as appropriate.

Further actions responding to this proposal are covered in actions 2D and 2G listed in response 2.

Action	Timescale	Responsible Officer
1A All business cases include full costing and will all be reflected appropriately in the MTFP	December 2013 In line with the production of the MTFP	Head of Finance
1B To review and revise processes for challenge and assurance of business cases	December 2013	Head of People and Transformation / Head of Law and Standards

Recommendation 2

R2 The Council should address with more urgency the weaknesses in its governance arrangements that underpin its decision making to support improvement. This would include:

- strengthening committee work programming arrangements to ensure they are timely, meaningful, informative, transparent, balanced, monitored, and joined up;
- reviewing and updating the Council's constitution ensuring that roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clear, and that all members understand and apply their respective roles in relation to each other without compromising independence;
- empowering members to be more proactive and accountable for their roles and responsibilities;
- strengthening decision-making arrangements to ensure transparency and appropriate safeguards are in place;
- strengthening scrutiny arrangements to more effectively inform and challenge policies, options, decisions and actions, and hold Cabinet members, officers, partners and others to account more robustly to drive increased pace of progress and improvement;
- strengthening and mandating member and officer development and learning programmes based on competency assessments to improve skills and understanding to enable them to undertake their roles more effectively; and
- addressing information security and business continuity arrangements.

Response 2

General Narrative

Overview and Scrutiny

Scrutiny Members and Officers recently took part in the WAO Scrutiny Study. The resulting action plan for Newport was adopted within the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2012-13, and we have already made good progress in responding to these actions. A Scrutiny Improvement Group is in place, and has made a number of important changes to make scrutiny processes more robust, including implementing a new work programme process which puts Members at the centre of identifying and prioritising scrutiny topics. This included a Work Programming conference in September. Further work now needs to be done to improve the integration of scrutiny in policy and decision making processes, and to address weaknesses in the relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive.

Constitution

The Council's constitution has been updated as necessary since 2001. A new model Constitution has been drafted which introduces a more logical structure for the Constitution in future.

Member and Officer Development

In line with the requirements of the Measure, the Democratic Services Committee has been leading a review of the Member Development Programme, which is nearing completion. Democratic Services Committee adopted a strategy in July 2013. A Follow up report will be considered on 24 October 2013. All members have been offered the opportunity to discuss individual needs with the Leader of their Political Group, the Head of Democratic Services or the Organisational Development team

Background work has started on a training and information plan for officers on decision- and policy-making, and this will be developed alongside the ongoing review of these processes.

Actions

Action	Timescale	Responsible Officer
2A Complete implementation of the WAO Scrutiny Study Action Plan, driven by the Scrutiny Improvement Group.	By Dec 2014	Head of Law and Standards
2B Implement regular meetings between	First meetings to be	Head of Law and

Scrutiny and the Executive, to clarify roles and responsibilities and establish protocols for interaction.	held by Dec 2013.	Standards
2C Review the new work programming arrangements for scrutiny, including consideration of how work programmes are integrated with those of Cabinet and others.	By Summer 2014	Head of Law and Standards
2D Review current policy- and decision-making processes, to clarify roles and responsibilities of the different parties and set out a corporate standard for the consideration of new policies, allowing for proper and full consultation with Members.	By Summer 2014	Head of Law and Standards
2E The Democratic Services Committee will take the lead in revising the constitution and will take the opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities or governance arrangements.	Initial report to Democratic Services Committee on 24 October 2013 followed with incremental reports aiming at a reviewed constitution being available for consideration at the AGM in May 2014 or the following ordinary meeting.	Head of Law and Standards
2F To complete the review of Member Development, currently being carried out by the Democratic Services Committee.	Democratic Services Committee adopted a strategy in July 2013. A Follow up report will be considered on 24 October 2013. Updates will continue throughout the year.	Head of Law and Standards / Head of People and Transformation
2G To implement a training and information plan for officers on policy and decision making processes.	By Dec 2014	Head of Law and Standards / Head of People and Transformation

The council has a variety of measures in place to address information security issues, including staff training. The following actions will be under taken as a result of the Corporate Assessment

Action	Timescale	Responsible Officer
2H Cabinet Member approval and publication of the Information Risk Policy	October 2013	Head of Customer and Information Services
2J Establish an Information Governance Group as required by the above policy.	November 2013	Head of Customer and Information Services
2K Provide an annual update of the Information Risk Report to Audit Committee. This report	June 2014	Head of Customer and Information

includes the council's arrangements for information security and records information security breaches		Services
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Recommendation 3

R3 The Council needs to quickly address weaknesses in its strategic financial planning and management to ensure that it is able to deliver its planned improvements. In doing so, the Council needs to:

- strengthen medium-term financial planning with fuller consideration of demographics, projections and priorities as well as the management of risks that are linked to the risk register(s);
- the delivery of financial savings needs to be monitored and reported more effectively at a corporate level as well as the investments being made to improve/maintain services;
- strengthen the status of financial management at a strategic level and ensure that responsibility is aligned to corporate objectives and accountabilities; and
- ensure there is sufficient challenge to ensure that savings/investment plans are delivered and any budget overspends are highlighted and addressed by early intervention.

Response 3

The Assessment made recommendations regarding the Council's medium term financial planning and budget processes. Following the previous study work undertaken by WAO on medium term financial planning and through improvements already identified within the Service Area's service plan, these areas of work are already being strengthened. The following table identifies each of the recommendations and lists action points already undertaken or which will be undertaken to address them.

Action	Timescale	Responsible Officer
3A A detailed Medium Term Financial Plan has been developed including key demographic data and detailed inflation modelling.	Sep 2013	Head of Finance
3B As part of the development of the Change Programme, the Council's Improvement Plan and priorities are being considered.	Sep 2013	Head of Finance
3C Budget pressures arising from identified change programmes are considered for funding as part of the Council's budget planning process including the funding implications of any investments.	Oct 2013	Head of Finance
3D A review of the risk register will be undertaken as part of the budget setting process (November 2013) with a further review to be undertaken in line with the production of the corporate risk register	Jan 2014	Head of Finance
3E Revised budget monitoring procedures have been implemented and are being reported regularly to senior management and the Council's executive.	Sep 2013	Head of Finance
3F All savings are now reported with progress as part of the budget monitoring process.	Sep 2013	Head of Finance
3G Regular reporting through specific finance agenda items to the Senior Leadership Team, Corporate Management Team and Cabinet ensures that financial management is a regular agenda item for all key meetings. Development of a budget prioritisation model as the basis for informing decisions has been commenced	Jul 2013 Oct 2013	Head of Finance
3H Through the medium term financial plan, all change and efficiency projects are now being subject to a business case process demonstrating investment, savings and delivery mechanisms to ensure they are robust and deliverable.	Oct 2013	Head of Finance
3J Budget overspends are reported monthly and necessary	Sep 2013	Head of

intervention and actions identified.		Finance
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Recommendation 4

R4 The Council should address weaknesses in its people management arrangements with more urgency to tackle long-term deficiencies to ensure it has the capacity and capabilities necessary to change and improve. In doing so, it should:

- ensure that the 360° appraisal process is fully integrated into its arrangements to manage staff performance and development;
- establish an integrated workforce and succession plan to support and develop the Council's current and future workforce to meet the organisational need;
- address its longstanding organisational development deficiencies;
- address manager capacity and capability to manage, both in terms of basic core management skills and in managing the performance of their staff;
- establish much clearer and better communicated recruitment and retention strategy linked to workforce development, talent management, personal development and training; and
- continue to improve the management of sickness levels, focusing on the areas where there is least improvement.

Response 4

The council had already identified areas for improvement in its people management arrangements prior to the corporate assessment and had developed a programme of work. Newport is one of 14 authorities to have taken part in a regional workforce planning pilot, the next stage of which is to move from data analysis to clear workforce action planning.

Newport is in a position of reducing management posts across the council as part of its planned change programme and that any work on succession planning (itself suggestive of career progression and promotion), recruitment and retention must be viewed in this context.

The organisational development team has recently undergone a number of changes since the corporate assessment, prompted in part by the findings of the Investors in People diagnostic that had already been undertaken. Resulting from this a number of priority areas under this framework now form the basis of the organisational development plan for 2013 - 2014.

Work will also continue in relation to sickness absence, reductions have been delivered over the last 2 years based on targeted intervention, this work will continue in line with agreed plans.

Action	Timescale	Responsible Officer
4A Carry out 360' appraisals for Heads of Service as part of NCC's Review process	March 2014	Head of People and Transformation
4B Development of a workforce plan to support the delivery of the Prospectus for Change, which is linked to recruitment and retention and talent management	April 2014	Head of People and Transformation
4C Senior member of the Policy team brought in to assist the OD team with strategy, work planning and new management arrangements	August 2013	Head of People and Transformation
4D Review the Organisational Development plan to align it with the Investors in People framework	December 2013	Head of People and Transformation
4E Undertake a skills audit for employees against key compliance areas, this will enable us to target management interventions where required	March 2014	Head of People and Transformation
4F Develop and implement a Management Development Plan to include a suite of management development interventions such as manager induction,	February 2014	Head of People and Transformation

Senior Management Forum, 'Middle Managers' Forum, coaching for performance and Management Fundamentals		
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Recommendation 5

R5 The Council needs to increase the pace of change to better exploit and use its information technology and quickly address remaining weaknesses in its arrangements to better support improvement. In doing so, the Council needs to:

- develop and align plans to deliver improvement by using technology that are linked to outcomes and include clear targets and milestones to support the monitoring of progress;
- review, evaluate and report on the effectiveness and return on investment of technology projects; and
- implement robust arrangements to effectively scrutinise and challenge technology projects and service provision at local, regional and national level.

Response 5

The 'technology projects' that the council undertakes are best defined by the organisation as Business Change projects, as improvements and efficiencies in business process or service delivery will most often be the driver for change. Many of these projects will use technology as an enabler but it is very difficult to assess the impact of the technology in isolation because of the inter-relationships between technology and the other factors affecting the change. Progress on all key projects is reported into and monitored through the Council's change programme governance arrangements.

Scrutiny of change projects will be in accordance with the actions supporting Recommendations 1 and 2

Action	Timescale	Responsible Officer
5A The Information and IT strategy will be reviewed and updated in line with the publication of the Welsh Government Digital First Strategy. This review, and the development of the 14/15 service plan for Customer and Information Services make more explicit links with the outcomes already identified for the service area	Review in line with the publication of the WG strategy Service plan for 14/15 completed by July 14	Head of Customer and Information Services
5B Change and Efficiency Boards to approve project methodology to include a project close report and a benefits realisation report.	December 2013	Head of People and Transformation

Recommendation 6

R6 Put in place arrangements that enable the Council to formulate, scrutinise, approve and publish its improvement objectives in a timely way to meet its statutory obligations under the Measure. In doing so, the Council should:

- Develop a more comprehensive, open and transparent approach to public reporting.
- Ensure that internal reporting is systematic, regular and getting to the right groups with a stronger focus on priorities.
- Develop a clear and agreed approach to prioritisation of improvement objectives and the development of measures for these improvement objectives that involve scrutiny members at an early stage and a stronger approach to consultation.
- Enable members to effectively challenge and scrutinise service performance:
 - clarify the respective roles of Performance Board and scrutiny;
 - ensure that both groups receive regular, high-quality, priority-focused performance information;
 - ensure that meeting agendas allow for sufficient time for members to focus on (broad) underperformance in both; and
 - provide training on effective challenge and scrutiny for members.
- Further embed the approach to business and service planning and ensure that corporate and single integrated plans are included.
- Improve the corporate approach to risk management.
- Improve target setting to better reflect the service/performance standards the Council wants to achieve and ensure resources are allocated to deliver desired standards through the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Response 6

The council has taken a new approach to developing the Improvement Plan for 2013/14. The plan now contains a much tighter set of priorities, and a set of actions and measures that support their delivery. This has enabled much more focussed reporting for the 2013/14 financial year and addresses some of the points in the recommendations above.

For the Annual Performance Review 12/13, several improvements have been made to the process, including the introduction of year end reviews of service plans and the introduction of regular monitoring of the proposals for improvement. Evaluation is improved as the success of the overall plan, each improvement objective and all actions and measures has been assessed. The review has been summarised, translated and published in hard copy and on the Council's website.

Action	Timescales	Responsible Officer
6A Improvements have been made to the process for compiling, and the publication of the Annual Performance Review 12/13	October 2013	Head of People and Transformation
6A The performance management pages on the internet will be reviewed and updated to improve public reporting	January 2014	Head of People and Transformation
6B Mapping of Performance Management data across the authority will be undertaken to improve internal and external reporting	March 2014	Head of People and Transformation
6C The plan for delivery of the 14/15 includes arrangements for public consultation and for early consultation with scrutiny in order to deliver a plan which complies further with LM 2009	June 2014	Head of People and Transformation
6D The terms of reference of Performance Board will be	January	Head of People and

reviewed to clarify the role of the board and its relationship to the councils scrutiny function.	2014	Transformation
6E A training session on Performance Management to include effective challenge will be developed and offered to members	March 2014	Head of People and Transformation
6F Review and revise the council's Risk Management Strategy and develop an action plan for the delivery of the strategy	January 2014	Head of People and Transformation
6H Review service planning guidance for 14/15 to include guidance for target setting and links with Medium term financial plan and single integrated plan.	November 2013	Head of People and Transformation