



## **REPORT BACK ON CONFERENCE SEMINAR**

---

**Report to**  
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

19<sup>th</sup> July, 2006

**Report of**  
Leader of the Council

**Title: Driving improvement: beyond CPA**  
**LGA improvement conference and exhibition 28 February - 1 March 2006**

### **1 Introduction**

1.1 This report summarises the benefits of attending the LGA Improvement Conference and exhibition held in Newcastle on 28 February-1 March 2006.

### **2 Recommendations**

2.1 Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is recommended to note the report.

### **3 Information/Background**

3.1 Improving the performance of local government and the quality, effectiveness and delivery of local public services has been a key issue for both national and local government in recent years.

3.2 As part of the government's approach, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment system was introduced in 2002 to provide a national league table of councils. The methodology was significantly revised by the Audit Commission in 2005 and is now known as the "Harder Test".

3.3 Coventry was one of 12 councils categorised as "Poor" in the 2002 Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Some significant improvements were made in 2003 through the Modernisation & Improvement Plan and Scrutiny Coordination Committee contributed to this by regularly monitoring and reviewing progress. Despite this, however, our categorisation remained as "Poor" in December 2003.

3.4 In December 2004, our categorisation jumped two places to "Fair" – this was partly a result of a good Corporate Assessment inspection in February 2004 and partly a result of service scores and assessments improving over the period April 2003 – December 2004.

3.5 In December 2005, we were awarded 2 stars and judged to be "Improving Well" under the new CPA methodology. In June 2006 we moved up to 3 stars and "Improving Well". Only two of the other councils designated as "Poor" in 2002 have so far achieved this status and Coventry is the first to do so under the full "Harder Test" methodology.

3.6 It is a measure of our progress that we were invited by the LGA to lead three of the workshops held at the conference. I led a session on "Tackling underperformance and sustaining recovery". One of our officers was also asked to lead workshops on "Exploiting Area Agreements" and "Improvement through effective scrutiny", but was unable to attend the conference to do so.

#### **4 Benefits of attending**

4.1 While valuing independent inspection and peer review of specific areas of work, this council has always been critical of the CPA methodology itself, the complex way in which overall scores are calculated, the costs of the inspection process itself and the disruption which it causes to day to day business.

4.2 We are not alone in thinking this and the conference provided the opportunity to debate the future of inspection and regulation as well as providing the opportunity to network with other Members and to promote Coventry and our achievements.

4.3 Delegates agreed that the current regulatory regime has reached the limits of its capability to promote improvement:

- the number (and sometimes competing nature of) national priorities, targets, plans and indicators hinders joined up delivery at the local level
- the inspection regime fosters compliance rather than improvement and innovation
- it has become too burdensome and resource intensive, both in terms of the direct costs of regulation and the costs of compliance.

4.4 The LGA used the conference to launch a new alternative, local government led, approach to performance management: *"Driving improvement – a new performance framework for localities"*. This had been developed by the LGA Improvement Board, of which I am a member, in conjunction with the IdeA and proposes that a performance management framework for local government should be:

- locally steered and owned but independently validated and quality assured
- founded in better and more topical comparative information about service performance
- streamlined and less burdensome for all but tailored for local risk and need
- providing assurance that minimum standards of delivery are being met while driving improvement across the piece
- prioritising bottom up pressures from partners and citizens while accepting a role for national targets, audit and proportionate inspection
- allowing local flexibility while providing some degree of comparability for the public, councils themselves and Government.

4.5 Based on these principles the framework comprises five key elements:

- published annual assessment
- periodic peer challenge
- annual independent audit
- streamlined inspection, proportionate to risk
- sector led intervention.

4.6 These elements are not new and are already used in different ways within existing regulatory systems. However the proposals reconfigure the shape of these elements, the emphasis placed on each of them, how they come together in an overarching framework, and critically where responsibility for delivery ultimately lies.

4.7 Delegates recognised that such a reconfiguration would need to be tailored to local circumstances. For example, poorer performing councils could legitimately benefit from stronger peer challenge and inspection than those performing well.

4.8 The conference agreed that local priorities should be at the heart of the framework. These priorities should be locally negotiated and determined with any national priorities restricted to issues of inescapable national concern. It is delivery against these priorities that needs to be performance managed and to do this well means engaging effectively with citizens and customers. Among other things this means making decisions on the nature and quality of local public services based on a robust understanding of local people's wants and needs and ensuring their degree of satisfaction drives our assessment of how well we are doing.

## 5 Costs

5.1 As I was a guest speaker at the conference, the LGA paid for one night's accommodation, one conference day rate and travel costs. The second night's accommodation of £125 and the second conference day rate of £220 were paid for by the City Council.

### List of background papers

Proper officer: Head of Corporate Policy

Author: Telephone 024 7683 1000

Cllr Ken Taylor

(Any enquiries should be directed to the above)

Other contributors:

Roger Hughes, Head of Corporate Policy Telephone 024 7683 1090

Papers open to Public Inspection

**Description of paper**

**Location**

None