

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE:	Corporate Policy and Performance
DATE:	21 January 2010
LEAD OFFICER:	Chief Executive
TITLE:	Peer Review
REPORT NUMBER:	OCE/10/002

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

At its meeting on 13 January 2009, the Continuous Improvement Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive relating to the Council's Action Plan in response to the HMIE (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education) report on the joint inspection of services to protect children and young people in Aberdeen City. The report made reference to arrangements made with Renfrewshire Council for that local authority to provide the City Council with peer review support relating to child protection services.

The Continuous Improvement Committee agreed to endorse the peer review and to request officers to submit a report on the implementation of a peer review across all Council services to the Committee within two cycles.

This report brings before the Committee an update on the position relating to the use of peer review within the Council.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee resolves to note the position relating to the use of peer review within the Council.

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

While this report has no direct financial implications, its subject matter relates indirectly to the overall financial position of the Council.

### 4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

The subject matter of the report relates, directly or indirectly, to all Council policy objectives and principles, to the delivery of the Council's Interim Business Plan and to all aspects of *Vibrant, Dynamic and Forward Looking* and the Single Outcome Agreement.

## 5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

As with Service and Community Impact above, the subject matter of the report relates to all the Council's activities in serving the City.

## 6. REPORT

Following the Accounts Commission's public hearing in May 2008, the Commission's findings stated the City Council lacked a full appreciation of the seriousness that it faced at that time and that it lacked the capacity to carry forward the changes that were needed. External support, including peer review, was recognised as a means by which both to increase self-awareness and to increase capacity within the Council.

Audit Scotland's Best Value progress report on the City Council published in July 2009 states that "the Council has recognised the need to build capacity within the organisation and has done this by actively securing external support and by developing its existing capacity". The report notes external help secured as follows:

- CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) – to carry out training for elected members and provide placements to give additional accountancy support to develop systems and review schemes of delegation and financial regulations
- Consultants – to lead and support work on bank reconciliations and develop the Council's internal audit programme
- CIPFA/IPF (Institute of Public Finance) – to support the development of the Asset Management Strategy
- Independent support and challenge on housing improvements as recommended by the Scottish Housing Regulator
- City of Edinburgh Council – on homelessness services
- Renfrewshire Council – for peer review on child protection services
- West Lothian Council – for peer review of financial management

Audit Scotland also noted the City Council's constructive engagement with the External Support Group facilitated by COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) and SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives). The Accounts Commission commended the City Council on its progress across a range of activity.

In addition, a number of Council services are active members of partnerships with other local authorities to provide mutual quality assurance schemes including for example the Public Analyst Laboratory, Environmental Services and Commercial Premises and Trading Standards. The Council is a member of a number of benchmarking groups and it should also be noted that the Council itself is often called upon to provide advice and examples of good practice to others.

The Committee will be mindful of the fact that in the intervening period since the Continuous Improvement Committee's meeting in January 2009 a new

team of Directors has been appointed, with the last to take up post beginning work in September 2009, and that recruitment to a new team of Heads of Service is due to be complete by March 2010.

The new senior management group, working with the elected members, is responsible for driving forward the improvements identified within the Best Value progress report and will continue to make use as appropriate of peer review, external support and advice from other local authorities, from other parts of the public sector, the voluntary sector and the private sector. Although the External Support Group will soon be formally stood down, the Chief Executive's colleagues in SOLACE have made clear to her that informal support will continue to be made available to the City Council.

As stated in the Council's response to the Accounts Commission's findings on the progress report – "given the centrality of clear responsibility and accountability in the Council's new organisational structures at both Committee and Directorate level, and given the fundamental requirement for robust self-assessment as national scrutiny arrangements are transformed the importance of the Council's corporate performance management processes are fully appreciated both by elected members and officers. In seeking to deliver against timescale and within budget the priorities enshrined within the Single Outcome Agreement and *Vibrant, Dynamic and Forward Looking* it is recognised that performance management arrangements within the Council must be kept continually under review".

In moving this agenda forward at a Council-wide level, the Corporate Management Team is currently in discussion with colleagues at Perth and Kinross Council with a view to adopting that authority's *How Good is Our Council?* guide to evaluating services making use of quality indicators. The intention being to put in place within the Council arrangements to ensure an accurate level of self-awareness to allow meaningful and fruitful engagement with Audit Scotland and its partner inspection bodies as shared risk assessment is developed over the coming months.

Further reports on these matters will be brought to Committee in future cycles and in the meantime it is recommended that the Committee notes the position relating to the use of peer review within the Council.

## 7. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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## 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None