

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 24 January 2008

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director Corporate & Policy

**SUBJECT:** CPA Corporate Assessment and Joint Area Review of Children and Young People

**WARDS:** Borough-Wide

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

This report summarises the background to the forthcoming Corporate Assessment and Joint Area Review inspections, the process and timetable, and arrangements for the preparation of a self assessment for the Corporate Assessment.

**2. RECOMMENDATION: That**

- (1) The arrangements for the CPA Corporate Assessment and the Joint Area Review of Children's Services be noted.
- (2) Authority be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader to approve the Self Assessment for submission to the Audit Commission.

**3. BACKGROUND TO THE CORPORATE ASSESSMENT**

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is an annual rating of all top tier authorities (unitary, metropolitan and county councils) published in February. The rating is based on a combination of:

- Annual service assessments (Children, Adult Social Services, Environment, Housing, Culture and Benefits)
- The annual use of resources assessment; and
- A corporate assessment of the Council conducted every three years

Each of these elements is given a score of 1-4 (4 is best) and they are combined to produce a star rating (in February 2007 Halton was rated as 4 stars).

As well as a star rating, there is an annual "direction of travel" assessment ranging from "not improving" to "improving strongly". In

February 2007, Halton Borough Council was judged to be “four star, improving well”.

As stated above, part of the overall CPA rating is determined by a Corporate Assessment which takes the form of a two week inspection. Halton was inspected in 2002 (scoring 3 out of 4) and in 2005 (when the score increased to 4 out of 4). The Audit Commission will conduct a further corporate assessment in April. The Corporate Assessment has been made tougher since 2005 (“the Harder Test”). The outcome can have a major impact on Halton’s 2008 CPA rating and will influence the risk assessment element of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA from 2009).

The Corporate Assessment looks at:

- what is the Council, together with its partners trying to achieve?
- what is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?
- what has been achieved?

The inspection covers all areas of the Council’s activity (although the main spotlight on Children’s Services comes through the Joint Area Review rather than the Corporate Assessment). It starts from a self assessment submitted by the Council. Using this, together with a survey of partners (the stakeholder survey) and key documents the inspection team will identify areas for investigation. The timetable for this is:

4 February 2008	Council submits the self assessment
27-29 February 2008	Inspection team in Halton for document review. Tour on 27 February 2008, feedback on areas for investigation on 28 February 2008.
31 March - 11 April 2008	Inspection takes place through interviews, focus groups and observation
22 July	Report published

The inspection team will comprise of six individuals - the Lead Inspector, two other Audit Commission Inspectors (one of whom is a link to the Joint Area Review), a peer officer, a peer member and a support officer.

During their visit, the team are likely to want to interview a selection of Executive Board Members, PPB Chairs and other Members.

#### 4. **BACKGROUND TO THE JOINT AREA REVIEW (JAR)**

JAR is also on inspection, but it will look at how well services for children in Halton are being provided, not just by the Council, but by those who work with us such as Connexions, the Primary Care Trust, Police, Probation and voluntary organisations. Inspectors will look in detail at a number of randomly selected cases of our most vulnerable children to see how closely and effectively the partners work together to provide the right help and support. As well as examining files, the inspectors will interview children, parents, carers, other frontline workers and Councillors. At the end of the inspection, the following specific areas will be rated from one (inadequate) to four (outstanding).

- Children in need of safeguarding
- Children in care
- Children who have a learning difficulty and/or disability
- Service management
- Capacity to improve

The JAR inspection will take place at the same time as the CPA Corporate Assessment, and the link inspector will be a member of both teams. The self assessment for JAR is the review of the Children and Young Peoples Plan which was submitted as part of our recent Annual Performance Assessment, but otherwise the timetable will be the same.

27-29 February 2008	JAR inspection team in Halton for document review.
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31 March 2008 - 11 April 2008	Inspection takes place through interviews, focus groups and observation
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#### 5. **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CPA CORPORATE ASSESSMENT AND JOINT ARE REVIEW**

Each of the two inspections will provide evidence to the other. The JAR will provide the evidence on what we have achieved for Children & Young People in Halton as part of the Corporate Assessment. The Corporate Assessment will provide information to the JAR on the capacity of the Council and its ability to support improvement in Children's Services.

#### 6. **CORPORATE ASSESSMENT SELF ASSESSMENT**

As stated in 3 above, the Council is required to submit a self assessment to the Inspection Team by 4 February 2008. This must explain to the Inspection Team in no more than 25 pages what Halton

is like, our vision, ambition and priorities, and provide evidence of capacity and achievement. Work has been in hand for some time gathering evidence, with a workshop for senior managers and interviews of a cross section of members, staff and partners by experienced inspectors to find out how we appear to outsiders.

The information gathered in this way has helped us to draft a self assessment. It is important that it is a realistic view of Halton Borough Council which is recognisable to Members, Officers, Partners and residents so that it will be corroborated during the interview and focus group stage of the inspection.

A draft will be circulated to Executive Board Members for comment. Given the deadline for submission, it is recommended that authority to finalise the submission be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader.

## **7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The inspections will not themselves have any implications for the setting or implementation of policy. However, they will provide an independent assessment of the soundness of our policy framework and our success in achieving our ambitions for Halton.

The findings of the inspection will include recommendations for further improvement.

## **8. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

The cost of the CPA inspection is included within our external audit fees.

## **9. IMPLICATIONS FOR**

- Healthy Halton
- Urban Renewal
- Children & Young People in Halton
- Safer Halton
- Employment Learning and Skills

See Section 7 above

## **10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

“CPA - The Harder Test” - R Mackenzie, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Municipal Building, Widnes