

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

Report to Executive Board

13 June 2005

Report to Council

20 June 2005

**MOVING FORWARD -
OUR RESPONSE TO GATENBY SANDERSON'S DIAGNOSTIC REPORT**

Report of: Leader and Chief Executive
Report author: Alex Hollingsworth and Caroline Bull
Ward: All
Lead member: Alex Hollingsworth
Scrutiny: Finance
Key decision: No

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

This report summarises the main findings and recommendations of the Gatenby Sanderson (GS) diagnostic report (April 2005) and sets out a plan of action to address issues raised and capitalise on opportunities identified, in order to significantly improve the council's performance.

Executive Board is recommended to support the 3-strand approach: -

- 1. An improvement programme over 2 years to build capacity, change culture and put new and improved systems in place;**
- 2. Clear leadership of the improvement agenda by the Executive Board and Senior Management Board, with a refresh of the Vision and much closer alignment of the Oxford Plan and resulting business plans with the Oxford Community Strategy;**
- 3. Customer focus consciously adopted as the driver of service design and delivery, the basis for prioritisation and the core of our Vision, plans and decision-making.**

1. Context

- 1.1 We face the challenge of making fundamental changes to the way that we provide services to:-
- meet the public's changing expectations of their council - our council tax payers are increasingly engaging as active citizens and demanding consumers, rather than as passive recipients of services;
 - respond to continuing pressure from central government to deliver improvements in cost, quality and access to services.
- Hence we need to design services around our customers (rather than around established local authority functions) and maximise the potential for central services and new technology to support new and more efficient ways of working.

- 1.2 In June 2004, based on an audit earlier in that year, Oxford City Council was assessed by the Audit Commission through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process as “weak”, on a scale of “poor” to “excellent”. We aim to move up that scale in subsequent inspections, through “good” by 2007, to “excellent” by 2009.

The CPA regime from 2005 places particular focus on:-

- cohesive and effective leadership at the most senior level;
- effective community leadership through partnership and shared outcomes;
- value for money and achievement of efficiencies;
- service improvement.

- 1.3 We engaged an ODPM approved and funded improvement partner – Gatenby Sanderson – to diagnose the Council’s issues and opportunities as the basis for moving forward to meet these challenges.

2. Summary of GS diagnostic report

- 2.1 The GS team based their report on meetings and focus groups with staff, members and partners, plus a review of relevant documentation. They reported on progress to date and areas to be addressed. Their findings accord with the current draft of the CPA progress assessment report, to be published in mid-June, which results from an inspection carried out by the Audit Commission in the last week of April.

- 2.2 Progress included:-

- a general picture of improvement;
- optimism;
- planning for significant service and process improvements;
- more focus;
- increasing willingness to deal with difficult agendas;
- poor performance being tackled;
- better communications to underpin change;
- willingness to consider new ways of working to improve customer service.

- 2.3 Key areas to be addressed were:-

2.3.1 Leadership & vision

- Stronger strategic leadership to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population
- Greater clarity on vision, direction, priorities, roles, responsibilities
- Clear ownership of improvement from the top – members & officers
- Better joint engagement between members & officers to shape the change agenda and service improvements - political will, leading-edge thinking, professional know-how
- Members, directors and 1st & 2nd tier managers all leading and communicating effectively and consistently

2.3.2 Customer focus

- Customer focus and customer satisfaction with services as the firm basis for improvement
- Support services aligned to effectively support the customer focus and change agendas
- Open-minded assessment of service delivery options, with customer input

2.3.3 Planning & performance management

- Improved business planning process
- Clearer, fit-for-purpose decision-making processes
- Better performance management
 - delivery plans to include timescales, responsibilities and targets
 - better and wider use of the CorVu tool

2.3.4 Improvement Board

- Distinctive rôle for Improvement Board to add value
 - Challenging progress against high-level goals
 - Advisor remit, to help solve most difficult problems

3. Actions to respond to the GS diagnostic report

3.1 Improvement programme

GS will take forward a 2-year comprehensive improvement programme with members & officers to address:-

- leadership development – members & officers;
- performance improvement;
- skills & systems enhancements;
- communications.

This will help build capacity, change culture and put new improved business planning and performance management systems in place to support change, in line with best practice. It will help members and officers work better together to meet joint objectives and streamline decision-making.

3.2 Leadership & Vision

- The Executive Board, together with the Strategic Management Board, will take the clear lead on the improvement agenda with immediate effect; and the EB improvement portfolio will move to the Leader of the Council.
- To facilitate this, the rôle of the Improvement Board will be redirected in line with GS's recommendations.
- To ensure clarity of purpose and direction within a city-wide context, the Oxford Plan (now being developed for 2006-9) will be directly aligned below the over-arching Oxford Community Strategy. So objectives will flow down from the Community Strategy, through the Oxford Plan and into the Council's business unit business plans.
- To build consensus and achieve a consistent view of the future, the Leader and Chief Executive will lead on a refresh of the Council's vision.

3.3 **Customer focus**

- As a conscious strategy, customer focus will, from now on, be at the core of our vision, strategy, plans and objectives. It will form the basis for all Council decisions and will help us to prioritise and do less, better.
- The Leader and Chief Executive will drive forward the principle and practice of customer focus in service design and delivery by leading a cross-cutting officer working group to effectively address culture, consultation, customer contact, social inclusion, communication and service quality improvement through feedback. This will be achieved through clear definition of projects and rigorous project management.
- Customer focus and consultation will be at the heart of the development of the 2006-9 Oxford Plan and associated budget decisions.

4. **Implications**

4.1 **Financial implications**

Delivery will be within existing budget, though some funding may have to be re-allocated or pooled.

4.2 **Legal & constitutional implications**

The matters set out in this report do not affect the Council's legal position. In the event that the implementation of any proposals requires enabling amendments to the Constitution, such amendments will be properly considered at the relevant time.

4.3 **Staffing implications**

No additional staff requirements are anticipated; but flexibility, professionalism and enthusiasm of members and officers will be essential if the approach is to succeed.

5. **Recommendation**

Executive Board is recommended to support the approach outlined in 3.1 – 3.3 above, to ensure we meet our improvement objectives in the interests of our customers.

6. **Timetable & review**

The new approach will begin immediately and the Leader and Chief Executive will report progress to the Executive Board in December 2005.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN & APPROVED BY:

Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth
Chief Executive:	Caroline Bull
Legal & Democratic Services:	Lindsay Cane
Financial Management:	Penny Gardner