

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01HRS, 14 AUGUST 2007

Hertfordshire County Council is performing well

Hertfordshire County Council is performing well, according to an independent report released today by the Audit Commission.

The Commission's corporate assessment report reveals that the Council is performing well and working towards a clear and challenging long-term vision with partners. A range of services provided by the Council have improved, including helping older people to remain independent and improvements to the Council's roads following additional investment. There is strong political, managerial and community leadership in most areas. Services delivered represent good value for money and the Council works hard to fill gaps in provision.

However, there are some inconsistencies in performance management, particularly in children's social care. Arrangements here are inadequate and there have been some serious problems with inconsistent criminal records checks on staff who work with children and the timeliness of assessments. Some aspects of adults' services are stretched and the Council needs to do more to promote the well-being and health of its residents, particularly for people over 50.

Debbie Hanson, Audit Commission senior manager said:

'I am pleased that the Council has already started working on the key messages from this report and has a robust plan to make improvements, particularly in children's social care.'

The report shows that:

- The Council and its partners recognise the challenges that the county faces and are addressing them .
- The Council understands well the needs of its population and is investing to meet challenges such as increasing demand, particularly in adults' services
- The Council is managing growth in a sustainable way with strong economic development
- The Council and its partners are successfully reducing fear of crime through high levels of investment in Police Community Support Officers and there are signs that crime levels are reducing

The report recommends that the Council should:

- Ensure that all strategies, plans and performance mechanisms include targets to measure progress
- Improve recruitment processes for children's social care including a robust system for screening staff who work with children
- Ensure that similar procedures are used for staff working with vulnerable adults
- Put in place a strategy to promote healthier communities and the well-being and health of people over 50

The aim of corporate assessment is to test how well councils understand local people and local places and how well they deliver a better quality of life for all their communities, whether through improvements in their own services or working in partnership with others.

Copies of the report are available from Hertfordshire County Council or on the Audit Commission web site at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports.

Notes to editors

1. Corporate assessment is one element of the wider inspection framework for single tier and county councils known as comprehensive performance assessment (CPA). A corporate assessment measures how well a council is working to deliver improved services and outcomes for local people. It uses key lines of enquiry to gather evidence for the assessment. These measure how well a council understands its local communities; how this shapes its ambitions and priorities; its capacity to deliver these; and what the council is achieving. In line with reducing the burden of inspection, through Strategic Regulation, corporate assessment will be carried out once in the three years up to December 2008.

2. An initial corporate assessment was carried out in 2002 in all single tier and county councils in England.

3. The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

4. As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

5. For further information about the Audit Commission, visit our website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

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