

Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

South Somerset District Council

Audit 2007/08

26 March 2009



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Status of our reports

The Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission explains the respective responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body. Reports prepared by appointed auditors are addressed to non-executive directors/members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors accept no responsibility to:

- any director/member or officer in their individual capacity; or
 - any third party.
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Key messages

- 1 The Council has made significant progress in delivering its priorities and was re-categorised from 'Fair' to 'Good' in our 2008 Corporate Assessment. Other key achievements include the following.
 - Overall, the Council ranked second in the country for improvement across a national set of indicators. This represents a significant improvement on the previous year, when the Council was ranked 15th nationally.
 - It has worked well with partners to increase the economic vitality and prosperity of the area and is responding appropriately to the need to help people adversely affected by the economic downturn, by offering a range of support and services.
 - There have been increases in the levels of recycling.
 - Crime has continued to reduce.
 - Community leadership and engagement with local people via the Area Forum mechanism continue to be strengths of the Council and there have been some innovative projects this year including allowing local people to decide how some 'service enhancement' money is spent in their area.
 - A new sustainable community strategy and the Council's new corporate plan bring greater clarity to the Council's vision and priorities and the Council has the people and skills to deliver these priorities.
 - The Council continues to offer good value for money and has achieved efficiency savings at above-target levels, partly by reviewing the processes and systems in some of its services.
 - The Council's Use of Resources scores for 2007/08 showed continued and significant improvement over the previous year and we gave an unqualified opinion on the Council's value for money arrangements.
 - The draft accounts presented for audit contained no errors of any significance, and we gave an unqualified opinion on these accounts.
 - The Council has made some progress in developing its approach to equalities and diversity, but this has been slower than expected due to recruitment difficulties.
 - The Council is making good progress in developing a set of plans to underpin future improvement but there is more to do to demonstrate their impact on outcomes for local citizens.
 - The Council has a clear performance management framework, but some performance reports for councillors and senior managers are limited and do not reflect all key priority areas.

- We assessed the Housing service as providing a 'fair' service with 'uncertain' prospects for improvement. We concluded that the service had made some positive achievements in the delivery of new affordable housing and has had some impact on preventing homelessness. However, it could do more to ensure the best use of existing private sector homes. The Council has produced an improvement plan in response to our findings.

Action needed by the Council

- 2 The key actions that the Council needs to take in response to the issues raised in this letter and in order of priority are as follows.
 - Review all key strategies to ensure that they align with the new corporate plan, ensuring that all of these contain action plans which are outcome-focused.
 - Review the Council's performance reporting and monitoring so that information provided to the Executive and senior managers is more comprehensive and reflects all key priority areas in the new corporate plan.
 - Continue to implement the agreed improvement plan following the Housing Inspection.
 - Implement the agreed action plan from our Data Quality Review.

Purpose, responsibilities and scope

- 3 This report provides an overall summary of the Audit Commission's assessment of the Council. It draws on the most recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), the findings and conclusions from the audit of the Council for 2007/08 and from any inspections undertaken since the last Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.
- 4 We have addressed this letter to members as it is the responsibility of the Council to ensure that proper arrangements are in place for the conduct of its business and that it safeguards and properly accounts for public money. We have made recommendations to assist the Council in meeting its responsibilities.
- 5 This letter also communicates the significant issues to key external stakeholders, including members of the public. We will publish this letter on the Audit Commission website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk. (In addition the Council is planning to publish it on its website).
- 6 Your appointed auditor, Brian Bethell, is responsible for planning and carrying out an audit that meets the requirements of the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice (the Code). Under the Code, the auditor reviews and reports on:
 - the Council's accounts;
 - whether the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (value for money conclusion); and
 - whether the Council's best value performance plan has been prepared and published in line with legislation and statutory guidance.
- 7 This letter includes the latest assessment on the Council's performance under the CPA framework, including our Direction of Travel report, and the results of any inspections carried out by the Audit Commission under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999. It summarises the key issues arising from the CPA and any such inspections. Inspection reports are issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under section 13 of the 1999 Act.
- 8 We have listed the reports issued to the Council relating to 2007/08 audit and inspection work at the end of this letter.

How is South Somerset District Council performing?

9 South Somerset District Council was initially assessed as Fair in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment carried out in 2004, but was then re-categorised as Good in our more recent 2008 assessment, which indicates a positive direction of travel over the four-year period. The following chart is the latest position across all district councils.

Figure 1 Overall performance of district councils in CPA



Source: Audit Commission

The improvement since last year - our Direction of Travel report

10 The Council has made significant progress in delivering its priorities in the past year and it has improved performance in many of its services. Its rate of improvement across a range of national performance indicators has been faster than others and the Council has also increased the number of its indicators in the best performing quartile. Highlights of achievement during the year include being shortlisted for 'most improved council of the year', improving planning services and attracting over £4m in external funding for the new Yeovil Innovation Centre. The Council continues to deliver good value for money and is committed to achieving efficiency savings. Whilst it has made some enhancements to access to services the Council acknowledges that there is more to do on this and also the equalities and diversity agenda, which has been slowed by recruitment difficulties to a key post.

How is South Somerset District Council performing?

- 11 Since our corporate assessment in May 2008, the Council has made good progress in refreshing its ambitions and objectives, and now needs to ensure that it can demonstrate the impact of its plans on outcomes for local people. Whilst elements of the Council's performance management framework are good, including effective scrutiny and consistent service planning, there is scope to improve some aspects of its performance monitoring. The Council continues to enhance its capacity - of both councillors and managers - to deliver improvements and face challenges ahead.

What evidence is there of the Council improving outcomes?

Delivering well managed and cost effective services

- 12 The Council has made good progress against its aim of delivering well managed and cost effective services. It has improved 79 per cent of a national set of indicators and was ranked second out of 388 councils for improvement. It has also done well to increase the number of its indicators in the best performing quartile from 19 per cent in 2006/07 to 33 per cent in 2007/08, which is around the average for district councils. Those indicators showing most improvement are appropriately aligned to the Council's priorities and include enhancing the environment and maintaining sustainable communities.
- 13 Performance against the Council's identified targets varies across service areas. There was strong performance in environment, planning, community safety, planning and advice services, where most or all targets were achieved. However across corporate health, housing and benefits services the Council achieved only half of the targets it had set itself. Overall, the Council achieved 75 per cent of all its targets for 2007/08.
- 14 Overall, the Council continues to provide good value for money for most of its services with the exception of planning. A clear focus on efficiency has helped the Council to exceed its three-year national efficiency target for example through innovative approaches to procurement and a rolling programme of 'lean thinking reviews' which focuses on streamlining business processes to reduce costs and improve efficiency. The first review targeted the revenues and benefits service and resulted in a restructuring of the service and a reduction of around 33 per cent in costs.

Economy

- 15 The Council has made good progress in achieving its corporate aim of increasing economic vitality and prosperity. It is working well with partners to provide opportunities for new and existing businesses in the area. A partnership between the Council, the Regional Development Agency (RDA), and the County Council has resulted in a new Innovation Centre, providing easier access to businesses starting up or expanding. Four businesses have recently opened, with another two expected to move in shortly. In Chard the Council has worked with the RDA on a regeneration project based on previous brownfield developments. This provides opportunities for local businesses to expand, with clear benefits to the local economy. The Council has a track record in securing external funding, including £4m for the Innovation Centre, and a further £969,000 for regeneration strategies.

How is South Somerset District Council performing?

- 16** The Council's regeneration strategy has delivered improvements to the public realm, including pavements and off-street lighting in the Princes Street retail area in Yeovil, and in Chard work with partners is resulting in the refurbishment of three derelict buildings. The Council is also supporting rural communities across the district as part of the Market Towns Vision. This approach involves ten key towns working together to achieve greater economies of scale, achieving, for example, tourist information signs at lower cost. These initiatives help to improve the quality of the built environment and improve economic vitality in the area.
- 17** The Council has responded well to the need to help people adversely affected by the economic downturn. During 2008 two large local employers closed resulting in job losses. The Council has provided a package of support to those affected which includes its Business Ambassador and business mentoring service, benefits services, homelessness support and council tax benefits together with local Jobcentre Plus officers. The Council has also made practical arrangements including reducing target times for payment of business invoice payment. These steps help sustain local businesses in times of recession and support local people facing hardship.

Improving health and well-being

- 18** The Council has made progress in working with partners to improve health prospects for its residents. The 'healthy lifestyles' team significantly increased the level of its service and provided 416 people with health MOTs in 2007/08 (almost twice the previous year's figure). At the same time, 626 people attending Active Somerset courses all lost weight and improved their body mass index.
- 19** The housing service has made some positive achievements in the delivery of new affordable housing. The Corporate Plan 2005-2012 sets a target of providing 50 units of social housing each year and it has exceeded this by delivering 360 units in the past two years. The service has achieved some success in preventing homelessness. The trend in people approaching the Council as homeless has reduced from 800 in 2002/03, to 185 in 2007/08, although this is a rise from 95 in 2005/06. The new county-wide choice based letting system went live in December 2008 and has proved popular with customers with over 11,000 people having registered. The approach includes 42 registered social landlords and a common housing register, policies and Information Technology platform. The Council has also established specific 'safeguarding vulnerable people' training programmes for staff based in libraries, to quickly identify and assist vulnerable people. This aims to improve access to housing for those most in need.

Ensure safe, sustainable and cohesive communities

- 20** The Council has worked well with partners to reduce crime levels in the area. Our corporate assessment concluded that 'the Council has a robust and productive Crime and Disorder Partnership (CDRP)'. This partnership has reduced crime levels across the five main categories during 2007/08, achieving better than average reductions in the categories of violence, robbery and theft of motor vehicle. Overall the CDRP maintained its position of 8th of 15 in its comparison group. As a result, the South Somerset area is a relatively safe area to live.

How is South Somerset District Council performing?

- 21** The Council and its partners have been innovative and persistent in securing better community safety outcomes for the area. During the last year, the Council extended the RadioLink service to over 220 businesses - a system to provide early warning of potential crime and disorder to pubs, shops and other public premises. The Mendip and South Somerset Community Safety Partnership has achieved a 40 per cent increase in 'Speedwatch' sessions, resulting in a reduction in cars speeding by 14 per cent. The Partnership focuses on programmes of education and targeting repeat offenders.
- 22** Community leadership continues to be one of the Council's strengths and it has shown an innovative approach to empowering its communities. Effective community forums in the four geographical areas across the district show clear progress in increasing community engagement. Developments since 2006/07 include the allocation of 'service enhancement' budgets allocated to each area forum. The committee processes allow local people to participate in allocating funding to local improvements such as increased play equipment and activities for younger people, provision of bus shelters, new events for members of minority ethnic groups and activities for older people. All councillors from the areas sit on one of the Area Committees - a good way of engaging non-executive councillors in community-led planning. Numbers of people attending local committees has grown significantly. In addition, an expanded number of community groups, such as those in Milford and Westfield, have resulted in provision of a youth café, free open-access holiday activities for young people and a 'clean-up' week in the area.

Environment

- 23** The Council has made good progress in achieving its aim of promoting a balanced natural and built environment against an already strong backdrop. Through the Somerset Waste Partnership, it has improved performance for recycling to 49 per cent, up from 45 per cent last year and remaining well above the threshold for the best performing councils. The Council has been effective in waste minimisation too and is the second best nationally for low levels of waste going to landfill - reducing the average amount of waste collected per person from 332 kg in 2006/07 to 321 kg in 2007/08. The Council is in the best performing quartile for the percentage of the population served by kerbside collection of recyclables, cost of waste collection, percentage of land with graffiti and flyposting. The Council has also improved the percentage of land littered from 25 per cent in 2006/07, to 12 per cent in 2007/08.
- 24** The Council has improved the performance of its planning service but there remains more to do. Processing performance for major, minor and 'other' planning applications all showed improvements from 2006/07, resulting in the Council moving from the worst performing quartile to the second and third for major and 'other' applications. The Council still remains in the worst performing quartile for minor applications performance. As a result of the improvements made, the Council has been released from its status as a Standards Authority for planning.

Access to services and Equality

- 25** The Council has made some progress on improving access to services for local people but there is more to do. There is good use of the Council's offices and all are now shared with partners, the latest being at Wincanton where the Council has secured a joint front office with the police, providing a one-stop shop for the public and reducing costs. The Council shares premises in Chard with social services and the Town Council. Chard Area office recently received an award for its accessibility from the Federation for Equality and Diversity in Somerset. However three buildings fail to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, two of which is owing to their status as listed buildings. Overall, 87 per cent of the Council's premises is accessible to people with physical disabilities.
- 26** The Council has made some progress in developing its approach to equalities and diversity, although this has been slower than anticipated due to recruitment difficulties into a key post. However, a senior manager has addressed some of the responsibilities and the Council has both a corporate equalities strategy and a corporate equalities group aimed at improving community engagement and mainstreaming its approach across the Council. It has completed a number of Equality Impact Assessments, although the outcomes of these are not yet clear. Successful initiatives include a 'New to Somerset' facility on the Council's website, targeting new communities arriving in the area, including specific references to Portuguese and Polish people and provision of specific food safety training to black and ethnic minority groups resulting in improved food safety for the public and good engagement for these minority groups providing services to the community. Overall the Council has self-assessed itself at Level 2 of the Equalities Standard - 54 per cent of councils have reached this level.

How much progress is being made to implement improvement plans to sustain future improvement?

- 27** The Council is making good progress in developing a set of plans to underpin future improvement but there is more to do on this. Since the corporate assessment, the Council and its partners have revised their vision for the area and the Council is in the process of translating that vision into a new corporate plan to guide its own operations. Alongside the new Corporate Plan, the Council has a comprehensive set of supporting strategies and plans, although the Economic Development Strategy is still being drafted. There is a robust process in place to review and update these plans on a regular basis. However, a number of these plans comprise a list of task-focused actions which the Council is largely successful in delivering but without being able to demonstrate the impact of these actions on improving outcomes for citizens. In plans where outcomes and performance measures do exist they are sometimes vague and lacking context. The Council intends to review all of its key strategies and plans to align them with the new Corporate Plan.

How is South Somerset District Council performing?

- 28** The Council has a clear performance management framework in place, including sound service planning processes, but there is scope to enhance some aspects of performance reporting and monitoring. Senior managers and the Executive receive quarterly reports of performance which are well laid out, easy to follow and accessible. However, the content is limited, for example, the monitoring report for quarter 2 contains 34 indicators, of which 17 are annually calculated and as a result have no progress identified. This means the report does not enable regular monitoring of all of the Council's Corporate Plan key target areas. These reports would also benefit from the addition of longer-term trend data and the consistent inclusion of quartile and available comparative data.
- 29** Scrutiny arrangements are effective. Each Area Committee has a local scrutiny role and matters are referred to the Council's main Scrutiny Panel. Attendance at scrutiny panels by the public is good. There are arrangements in place for scrutiny of Pioneer Somerset and the Somerset Waste Partnership, providing a formal monitoring function of joint and shared services. Scrutiny panel has addressed a number of issues including the Council's response to local people affected by post office closures and in developing the 'targets insert' approach for the Corporate Plan.
- 30** The Council has strengthened capacity within the organisation. Councillor capacity has been increased by securing places for three councillors on the IDeA Leadership Academy and the provision of specific training on finance by CIPFA. Half the councillors attending the Advanced Award for Elected Member Champions - a 'kitemark' for councillor training - at South West Regional Employers were from the Council. The Council was also awarded Beacon status for 'Neighbourhood and Community Champions: the Role of Elected members' for 2007/08. 100 managers have completed a Management Development Programme, 25 per cent of whom are working towards a management Diploma qualification, and four have places on the Msc programme in Public Sector Management. A further 35 staff have completed an Institute of Leadership and Management supervisory development course in the past year.
- 31** Progress on developing the potential for more effective joint working between Somerset councils has been mixed. A clearer commitment to joint working and the beginnings of a formal process with council leaders and chief executives has been recently agreed and a report on the first year's progress was produced in December 2008. However, there is still a lack of clarity about how the partnership will secure benefits. Current leadership arrangements need to be enhanced and speed of delivery improved if the potential benefits are to be realised. Plans and priorities have recently been re-assessed but require strong joint leadership across all the Somerset Councils to deliver the significant improvement and efficiency savings that have been identified.
- 32** The Council is making improvements to its internal processes which have helped to underpin its continued service improvement. During the year, the Council has improved its financial reporting so that it is now judged as 'performing strongly' by the Audit Commission, and it has also improved its financial standing and internal control. The audit committee plays a key role in ensuring action is taken on audit recommendations - both internal and external audit - and that effective action is taken to manage the Council's key areas of risk.

Inspection of Strategic Housing Services

33 During 2008, we assessed the Council's housing service as 'fair' (one star) with uncertain prospects for improvement. We concluded the following.

- The service has made some positive achievements in the delivery of new affordable housing including rural housing and works effectively with Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners to make best use of their homes. The service has achieved some success in preventing homelessness and has improved planning performance although there is more to be done. The service works well in partnership to reduce costs and deliver positive outcomes for local people. It has a good understanding of stock condition and provides a reasonable range of advice and assistance for homeowners.
- Customer access can be difficult and the service is not consistently customer-focused. The service does not currently have a comprehensive understanding of overall housing need and while in some areas it has a good understanding of its diverse communities this too is limited, although there are plans in place to address this. The Council has not maximised the opportunities for development in rural areas and targets for affordable housing provision are not consistently met. Empty homes and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) are not dealt with effectively and although some aspects of the delivery of disabled adaptations are good in some cases it takes too long for people's needs to be met. There are significant weaknesses in the quality of the Council's strategies. In addition, service quality is not always consistent with costs and the management of value for money is mixed.
- The Council has shown that it is ambitious for the service. The service benefits from strong political leadership and an effective portfolio holder. The service has a positive approach to partnership working and shows openness to learning from others and from external challenge.
- Some positive achievements and improvements have been made in areas such as the delivery of affordable housing, homelessness and planning. However, the track record of improvement in areas such as private sector housing and the cross-cutting areas of equality and diversity, access and value for money is mixed. Some actions in key plans have not been delivered on time.
- There are weaknesses in the service's approach to performance management and performance reporting and its future plans. It is uncertain whether the Council will be able to deliver a sufficient supply of housing in the future both through best use of existing housing and developing new housing. There is no significant growth in future budgets and service capacity has been reduced by long-term vacancies and sickness (although this is now improving) and some skills gaps as well as a lack of integration across strategic housing services.

34 The Council has responded to our assessment by producing an improvement plan, which it is in the process of implementing.

The audit of the accounts and value for money

35 Your appointed auditor reported separately to the Audit Committee on the issues arising from our 2007/08 audit and has issued, on 26 September 2008 :

- an audit report, providing an unqualified opinion on your accounts; and
- a conclusion on your vfm arrangements to say that these arrangements are adequate.

Use of Resources

36 The findings of the auditor are an important component of the CPA framework described above. In particular the Use of Resources score is derived from the assessments made by the auditor in the following areas.

- Financial reporting (including the preparation of the accounts of the Council and the way these are presented to the public).
- Financial management (including how the financial management is integrated with strategy to support council priorities).
- Financial standing (including the strength of the Council's financial position).
- Internal control (including how effectively the Council maintains proper stewardship and control of its finances).
- Value for money (including an assessment of how well the Council balances the costs and quality of its services).

37 For the purposes of the CPA we have assessed the Council's arrangements for use of resources in these five areas as follows.

Table 1

Element	Assessment 2007/08	Assessment 2006/07
Financial reporting	4 out of 4	3
Financial management	3 out of 4	3
Financial standing	3 out of 4	2
Internal control	3 out of 4	2
Value for money	3 out of 4	3
Overall assessment of the Audit Commission	3 out of 4	3

Note: 1 – lowest, 4 = highest

- 38 In line with its objective of promoting continuous improvement, the Audit Commission 'raised the bar' once more for the 2007/08 Use of Resources assessments, with the introduction of a number of new Use of Resources criteria and the removal of the 'optional' label for any Level 2 or Level 3 criteria - for this last year of the old approach, all these criteria are mandatory.
- 39 In spite of this, the Council improved its scores significantly last year, with Financial Reporting moving from Level 3 (performing well) to Level 4 (performing strongly), and Financial Standing and Internal Control both moving from 2 (adequate performance) to 3. None of the five theme scores are now below level 3. This is a commendable performance.
- 40 Within the Council, there is clearly a strong leadership and focus on managing VFM and improving this over time. The Audit Committee plays a key role in ensuring that action is taken on audit recommendations - internal and external - and that effective action is being taken to manage the Council's key risks. Finance staff provide very comprehensive working papers to support the figures in the financial statements, and any queries raised at audit are dealt with promptly and effectively.

Audit of the Financial Statements

- 41 A full set of accounts was available from the start of the audit, accompanied by a comprehensive electronic pack of working papers. When we asked officers for additional information during the audit, responses were consistently provided promptly and effectively, obviating the need for follow up requests. We identified no material or other significant errors in the accounts during our audit, and were able to give an unqualified opinion on these accounts prior to the statutory deadline of 30 September.

Data Quality

- 42** We carry out annual reviews to assess whether councils have in place proper management arrangements for data quality, and whether these are being applied in practice. Good quality data is the essential ingredient for reliable performance and financial information to support decision making. The data used to report on performance needs to be both accurate and timely.
- 43** The key findings from our 2007/08 review of the Council's arrangements are as follows.
- South Somerset District Council's arrangements for managing data quality continue to perform well and consistently above minimum requirements.
 - The Council has strengthened its arrangements for data quality since last year's review. There is clear, top level commitment to data quality, supported by sound corporate governance arrangements. A data quality strategy sets out the council's policy on data quality which is supported by a good range of operational procedures and guidance. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined at political and officer level and training is being rolled out to staff and members.
 - A number of systems and processes are in place to secure the quality of data and ensure that it is used effectively to manage and improve service delivery.
- 44** The key areas for improvements are as follows.
- Although protocols are in place for data shared with partners, external data is not yet subject to the same level of risk assurance as that produced internally.
 - Some data quality targets are in place, but this is not consistent across all service areas.
 - We identified weaknesses in the arrangements for producing performance information on the speed of processing benefit claims.
- 45** We have agreed an action plan with officers to address all these areas of weakness.

Looking ahead

- 46** The public service inspectorates have developed a new performance assessment framework, the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). CAA will provide the first holistic independent assessment of the prospects for local areas and the quality of life for people living there. It will put the experience of citizens, people who use services and local tax payers at the centre of the new local assessment framework, with a particular focus on the needs of those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. It will recognise the importance of effective local partnership working, the enhanced role of Sustainable Communities Strategies and Local Area Agreements and the importance of councils in leading and shaping the communities they serve.
- 47** CAA will result in reduced levels of inspection and better coordination of inspection activity. The key components of CAA will be a joint inspectorate area assessment and reporting performance on the new national indicator set, together with an organisational assessment which will combine the external auditor's assessment of value for money in the use of resources with a joint inspectorate assessment of service performance.
- 48** The first results of our work on CAA will be published in the autumn of 2009. This will include the performance data from 2008/09, the first year of the new National Indicator Set and key aspects of each area's Local Area Agreement.

Closing remarks

- 49 This letter has been discussed and agreed with the Council's Management Board. A copy of the letter will be presented at the Audit Committee on 26 March 2009 and at the District Executive meeting on 2 April 2009. Copies need to be provided to all Council members.
- 50 Further detailed findings, conclusions and recommendations on the areas covered by audit and inspection work are included in the reports issued to the Council during the year.

Table 2 Reports issued

Report	Date of issue
Audit and inspection plan	April 2007
Corporate Assessment	March 2008
Housing Inspection	July 2008
Annual Governance Report	September 2008
Opinion on financial statements	September 2008
Value for money conclusion	September 2008
Use of Resources Assessments	December 2008
Data Quality Review	December 2008
Annual audit and inspection letter	March 2009

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- 51 The Council has taken a positive and constructive approach to audit and inspection work, and I wish to thank the Council's staff for their support and cooperation during the audit.

Availability of this letter

- 52 This letter will be published on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk, and also on the Council's website.

Sophie Trim
Comprehensive Area Assessment Lead
26 March 2009

The Audit Commission

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

Copies of this report

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