

## AGENDA ITEM 8

<b>Committee</b>	Audit Committee	<b>AC/32/10</b>
<b>Date:</b>	13 December 2010	

### Monitoring of External Inspection Reports

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#### 1. Purpose of the Report

This report provides the committee with an update on recent changes to the external regulation and inspection landscape. It also provides an overview of the process for monitoring the outcomes of external recommendations, as well as an update (via appendices) on action plans against two recent inspections of adult social care and children's services.

#### 2. Changes to External Inspection and Regulation Requirements

The election of the Coalition Government has seen a change in the way that the public sector is held to account for delivering services. 2010 has seen the abolition of Comprehensive Area Assessment, disbanding of the Audit Commission, commitment to reducing the data burden on Local Authorities through removal of top-down centralised reporting based on the National Indicator Set and freeing up local areas to set their own Local Agreements and decide on their own targets without interference from Government.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2010, Minister of State for Care Services Paul Burstow announced that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) will no longer conduct an annual performance assessment of councils' commissioning of care under the existing framework. This decision, announced at the National Children and Adult Services Conference, comes as the coalition Government reviews its approach to the regulation and assessment of local public services. This new approach will see a shift towards more sector-led assessment, with councils holding greater responsibility for driving improvement.

There is currently much speculation over the future and nature of Ofsted inspections of children's services, and the Committee will be updated as soon as there is any certainty.

After the removal of these significant external inspection regimes, there remains a statutory framework of inspection and assessment as shown at appendix 5.

### **3. Corporate Improvement Plan**

The development of our Corporate Improvement Plan came as a result of the 2009 Annual Governance Statement which suggested the development of a framework for tracking the results of all external recommendations from audits, assessments and inspections across Essex County Council was needed so that they could be reported in parallel with progress against internal audits.

It is important that the Audit Committee are given suitable advanced warning of any inspections due to take place, and that the Committee maintains an overview of progress against the recommendations from external inspection. In particular, the Committee should be assured that the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Committee is monitoring and managing progress against service-specific inspection action plans.

However, given the abolition of the CAA, APA, and extensive plans already in place to monitor and scrutinise progress against plans already in place by services, the focus of the Performance and Organisational Intelligence Department should be on challenging and feeding issues through to the Audit Committee where there are significant risks – rather than maintaining a separate and duplicative Corporate Improvement Plan.

Actions arising from service-specific inspections will continue to be monitored by the Performance and Organisational Intelligence Department, which has teams locally based in each service area. The Assistant Director for Performance and Organisational Intelligence, Paul Abraham, attends key improvement meetings and has oversight of progress against improvement plans to ensure that sufficient safeguards are in place.

Inadequate or insufficient progress against service-specific action plans will therefore be reported to the Audit Committee by the Assistant Director for Performance and Organisational Intelligence on an exception basis, once revised action plans are in place.

At the same time, we will continue to develop our own approach to organisational assessment with a focus on issues such as peer review, value for money, and accountability to our customers.

### **4. External Inspection of Children's Services**

An inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services was undertaken by Ofsted in June-July 2010. A copy of this report is attached as appendix 1.

The Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee set up a Safeguarding sub-committee, which noted the results of the Ofsted inspection at the 2 September meeting and agreed to follow-up these matters as a priority. The Committee meets up to two times per month and has taken evidence from a range of witnesses, including: the Chairman of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board; internal officers; and key partners and stakeholders.

Progress against the action plan to address the recommendations is considered at every meeting. The recommendations have also been woven into the overarching Children's Services Improvement Plan, progress against which is monitored bi-monthly by the Children's Services Improvement Board.

A copy of the SCF Improvement Plan is attached as appendix 2.

## **5. External Inspection of Adult Services**

Essex County Council received a full inspection of adult social care in June 2010 by the Care Quality Commission. A summary report of the inspection is attached as appendix 3. Appendix 4 is the action plan prepared in response to the recommendations made.

The Community Wellbeing and Older People Policy and Scrutiny Committee received the summary of the inspection and the action plan in June 2010. A Member and staff inspection session, led by the CQC Chief Inspector, took place in June 2010 that enabled a full discussion of the action plan in small groups. The matter will be monitored again by the Policy and Scrutiny Committee in June 2011.