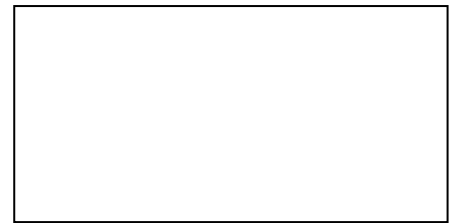




NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Name of Committee: Cabinet

Report From: John Edwards, Interim Chief Executive

Date: 5th June 2007

Report Title	Audit Commission Progress Assessment – February 2007
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1. Background

The Audit Commission Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) report published in March 2004 assessed this Council as 'poor'. Subsequently, the Audit Commission has completed annual progress assessments typically taking place in March. The current Progress Assessment was brought forward by the Audit Commission, with fieldwork taking place in November 2006, followed by report publication in February 2007.

The Council published the assessment report on its internet and intranet on the day of publication and produced a briefing note to all staff to accompany the report. A copy of the report was shared with the Lead Official and with leaders of the three political groups within the Council in February. Owing to the timing of the report publication and its proximity to the recent elections, the Progress Assessment has not yet been formally considered by Cabinet or shared in an appropriate public committee.

2. Key Issues

The Progress Assessment (attached as Appendix One) judged the Council as having made little progress since 2004, with some deterioration in key areas. The report sets out seven recommendations which are considered to be minimum requirements by the Audit Commission:

- The Council must demonstrate stronger political leadership across all parties. The immediate priority is for the strengthened leadership to deliver a balanced budget for 2007/08 and ensure it is delivered.
- The Council must ensure that it has effective managerial leadership which is critical to delivering the substantial improvements that must be achieved.
- The Council must urgently address weaknesses in the management and capacity of the finance function.
- The Council must strengthen its commitment to and engagement in strategic partnership working and co-operation with partners to develop joint delivery of services.
- The Council must continue to make improvements in service delivery. In the short-term the focus should be on delivering sustained improvements in housing, planning and benefits services.
- The Council must strengthen arrangements to secure the continuous improvement of services.
- The Council should take this report to an appropriate public committee meeting and share it with Government Monitoring Board.

Strategic Improvement Plan

The Strategic Improvement Plan (Phase Two) was approved by Management Board on 3rd May 2007. This followed the Government Monitoring Board meeting on 29th March where the Audit Commission discussed detailed elements of their recommendations with Councillors and senior officers.

The Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP) builds on the progress made with the first SIP and specifically addresses the seven recommendations set out in the Progress Assessment. The plan sets out our expectations for the improvement we intend to achieve and incorporates a wider range of actions than is represented by the Audit Commission recommendations. It currently sets out over 70 actions in considerable detail; a summary of the plan – developed to help a wider audience understand our approach – is attached as Appendix Two to this report.

The monitoring of this plan is critical in ensuring we succeed in the delivery of all the actions and achieve our objective of not being a 'poor' council; specific arrangements for monitoring progress has been put into place with weekly updates to Management Board and regular reporting of progress to Cabinet.

3. Recommendations

1. That Cabinet note the Audit Commission Progress Assessment Report.
2. That Cabinet approve the revised Strategic Improvement Plan and monitoring of progress.