

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 JULY 2009

AUDIT COMMISSION

REGENERATION INSPECTION REPORT

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director Regeneration, Community & Culture

Author: Anna Marie Lawrence-Lovell, Regeneration, Community & Culture Performance Manager

Summary

The report is being reported to the Committee to inform on the outcome of the Audit Commission Regeneration Inspection and to review the Council's action plan to address the recommendations within the report.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The Council action plan that has been developed in response to the recommendations from the Audit Commission report is within the council's policy and budget framework. The action plan supports the Council's Priority of 'Everyone Benefiting from the Areas Regeneration'.

2. Background

- 2.1 Medway Council was subject to a regeneration inspection by the Audit Commission in February 2009.
- 2.2 Regeneration inspections also took place in Gravesham, Swale, Thanet and Dover at the same time.

On a scale from zero to three stars the Audit Commission inspection team gave Medway Council a 'good', two-star rating with promising prospects from improvement. A full copy of the Regeneration Inspection report is attached to this document at Appendix A.

3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 The Audit Commission report concluded that: "The council's work to regenerate the area is good with promising prospects for improvement. An ambitious agenda has been set to tackle the significant challenges

the local area and its communities have faced following the closure of the Royal Naval dockyard and decline of manufacturing in the area. The council's approach with its partners effectively tackles the things which matter most to local people and focuses well on delivering a balance of social, physical and economic improvements."

3.2 "The council delivers good regeneration outcomes in a challenging funding environment from a relatively low spending base. Council tax is low and central government per capita grant is less in Medway than comparable councils. The council's externally funded regeneration partnership, Medway Renaissance, works effectively with limited resources. Highly skilled, able and committed managers and staff lead the council's work on regeneration."

3.3 Strengths highlighted in the inspection report were:

- Neighbourhood-based initiatives are helping to raise the skills and aspirations of many of Medway's most vulnerable communities and individuals.
- The area has seen job growth, and good business development and survival rates.
- The Council is successfully closing the gap between levels of educational attainment in Medway, and those in the rest of the region.
- The growth of the further and higher education sectors has increased take up of new skills and learning opportunities.
- Investment has been secured to deliver ambitious regeneration programmes, and good use is made of resources and land.

3.4 Areas for improvement highlighted within the report were:

- There should be more opportunities for local people to get involved in developing regeneration programmes.
- Tackling existing health inequalities remains a challenge for the Council and its partners.
- Opportunities to develop skills are not consistently available across all deprived communities.

3.5 To help Medway Council continue to improve, inspectors made a number of recommendations. These include:

- Improve people's understanding of what the Council wants to achieve through its regeneration of the area, and what the benefits are for local people.
- Manage the Council's performance better by measuring the impact of its plans and comparing its performance with others more widely.
- Work more closely with others to ensure a consistent and sustainable approach to regenerating more deprived areas.

3.6 The action plan attached to this report at Appendix B is the Council's response to the identified areas for improvement and recommendations made by the Audit Commission.

4. Risk Management

- 4.1 The Audit Commission Inspection Report has been in the public domain since 21 May 2009.
- 4.2 The actions identified in the Councils Action Plan address the key recommendations made by the Audit Commission and therefore address the key risks to our regeneration program identified by the Commission.
- 4.3 Individual actions will be subject to the risk management framework as part of the service planning process.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The Audit Commission as part of their inspection spoke to key community representatives i.e. Residents involved in project REIGNITE, partners e.g. SEEDA, University of Creative Arts and other universities, private sector partners, housing associations and Councillors and therefore the recommendations made by the Audit Commission take into account their views.

6. Financial and legal implications

- 6.1 There are no legal or financial implications.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 That Members endorse the Council's action plan in response to the Audit Commission Regeneration Inspection report.

Lead officer contact

Anna Marie Lawrence-Lovell, Regeneration, Community & Culture
Performance Manager, Research & Review, 01322 332443
annamarie.Lawrence@medway.gov.uk .

Background papers

Audit Commission Regeneration Inspection Report
Regeneration, Community & Culture Regeneration Inspection Action Plan