Item

Report to Executive Advisory Group

Improvement East **12 November 2008**
Subject: Waveney District Council
Report by: Secretariat

Purpose **Recommendation** **It is recommended that the Executive Advisory Group** **i) note the progress made with the improvement programme at Waveney District Council**

1. Introduction

1.1 Improvement East approved a bid from Waveney District Council at its meeting on 4 June 2008 in the sum of £580,998.

1.2 Waveney District Council had also been funded by Improvement East predecessor Building Capacity East for the sum of £638,727.

1.3 The basis of the bid to Improvement East was for funding for:-

- support to their finance function,
- appointment of a director of change management,
- support to their HR function,
- support for member development.

2. Engagement with Waveney District Council

Stephen Baker has kept me up to date on a regular basis with the improvement journey of Waveney District Council. I attended a meeting with him on the afternoon of 21 July 2008 where he briefed me thoroughly on the issues facing Waveney District Council and the improvement plan he was putting in place part of which is funded by Improvement East. He sends me regular email updates and I receive the minutes of Performance Management Improvement Board which meets on a monthly basis. I plan to return to Waveney District Council on the 18 December 2008 to attend a meeting of the Performance Management Improvement Board.

2.2 In addition I have spoken to Edwina Child, from the Audit Commission about the progress made in the Council as Edwina chairs their Performance Management Improvement Board.

3. Improvement Plan

3.1 Stephen Baker has introduced a new focus Improvement Plan addressing the following key challenges:-

- Leadership
- Performance Management
- Human Resources and Organisation Development
- Financial Management
- Partnership Working
- Customer Focus
- Developed and embedded organisational culture

3.2 In support of this improvement plan, Stephen Baker has employed Norman Rollo a HR professional who is also the Director of Change Management. This is an excellent appointment as Mr Rollo previously worked at Telford and Wrekin Council. In addition, an appointment has been made to the Director of Resources role (Section 151 officer) as well as the Assistant Chief Executive who is the monitoring officer and a further strategic director. The Council has therefore filled all its roles in the senior management team, alongside Mr Rollo's role.

3.3 The new improvement plan from my perspective identifies the key issues which Waveney District Council need to address over the next period.

4. Delivering Outcomes and Improvements

4.1 The Council are able to demonstrate a number of outcomes and improvements which they have delivered. In a recent presentation Stephen Baker delivered to the Performance Management Improvement Board he identified the following successes:-

- Major advancement in e-commerce providing increased choice to customers to contact the Authority to make bookings and payments on-line. Access improved in the following Services: Revenues and Benefits, Planning, Committee Services, Building Control, Development Control and Housing Options.
- Opening of the Marina Customer Service Centre on the 4 August 2008 proving a 'one-stop' location for WDC general customer enquiries in Lowestoft, 1st phase
- Customer Service improvements – Southwold has opened a joint Tourist Information and Customer Services Centre and Customer Access Terminals have been installed.
- Orbis Energy Offshore Renewable Centre delivered
- The Progress of 1st East flagship project Waveney Campus initially delayed due to LGR outcomes but with Suffolk Country Council and Norfolk County Council support the project and now recommenced.

4.2 In relation to BVPIs, (2007/08 performance data measured against 2006/2007 quartiles), the Council has seen an increase of 5% in BVPIs in top quartile, increase of 11.4% BVPIs in medium quartile and 19.7% BVPIs moved out of bottom quartile. In the past the Council have seen good performance in a waste, recycling community safety and this good performance is now joined by planning where two out of three BVPIs have raised to the top quartile,

revenues and benefits which now has a rating of 4 (excellent), environmental health, 4 out of 5 BVPIs raised to the top quartile and housing management 6 out of 9 BVPIs raised to the top quartile.

4.3 The Council has also concentrated on their Local Strategic Partnership and are in the process of appointing an LSP manager. This role will refresh the sustainable community strategy to take account of the new LAA2 targets and drive the council's community leadership role.

4.4 Considerable work has been done on community engagement and consultation through Community Engagement forums which have replaced previous EERA forums which were not effective. The council are also giving attention to equality and diversity and to school engagement.

4.5 The Council has also had a recent inspection of their environment and street scene and the outcome of that inspection was a fair service with promising prospects for improvement.

4.6 Council have also recently assessed their value for money score at a level 2 identifying procurement savings above target, partnership working delivering savings, improvements in their asset management strategy, e-commerce improvements and data quality improvements.

4.7 The Council still identify, quite rightly, a number of continuing challenges which include embedding the new senior management team in the Council, keeping a strong focus on the delivery of their improvement plan, managing the impact of local government review, embedding engagement and consultation across all services, ensuring that they continue to benchmark and compare their services, driving community leadership and improving their use of resources score.

4.8 The Improvement East funding has been primarily used to provide capacity and improve and maintain the finance and budgeting provision, employing the HR consultant and Director of Change Management and supporting member development.

5. Discussion with Edwina Child, Audit Commission

5.1 Edwina Child's overall assessment of Waveney District Council is that there are "green shoots" appearing but there is a considerable amount to do and these green shoots need to be tended very carefully. She believes that some of the changes are not yet embedded. Member leadership is improving and she supports the appointment of Mr Rollo in his role leading HR and Director of Change Management and reports that he is making a significant impact on the improvement programme of the Council. There is now strong performance management in the Council and a better culture where people have the right skills and are now in the right places. The opening of the Marina Centre for customer service is symbolic of that culture change and move forward.

5.2 There are still significant challenges in relation to financial management but she believes that the Council are doing the right things in relation to this agenda. The problems in financial management were systemic, deep rooted and are therefore a considerable ongoing challenge to the Council and will still impact on their use of resources score going forward.

6. Conclusion

Considerable resource has been given to Waveney District Council from, initially Building Capacity East and latterly Improvement East. My assessment is that there are some important and goods signs of improvement in this council but there is still a considerable way to go. There is undoubtedly a realism and acceptance of the need to change and the employment of specialist skills through our funding has undoubtedly made an important impact. I would agree with the assessment of Edwina Child that there are green shoots but the improvement journey needs to be monitored carefully which, of course, the Audit Commission is doing. The major challenge is in the finance and use of the resources arena but the reassurance I have is that the appointment of a permanent Director of Resources is an important step forward and he is doing the right things against these deep rooted systemic challenges.

6.1 I will attend the Performance Management Improvement Board in December and then report again to this group on further progress that is being made. I can confirm however that the money that Improvement East has awarded to Waveney District Council is being spent on those matters which were approved by this partnership in June of this year and are having a positive impact on the progress that this council is making.

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