

# **Cumbria Environment - Transport**

**Cumbria County Council**

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## Service Inspection

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission's Inspectorate under powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our Strategic Plan and Strategic Regulation. They also reflect the principles from the Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003). Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money, both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater co-ordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk).

This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

## Summary

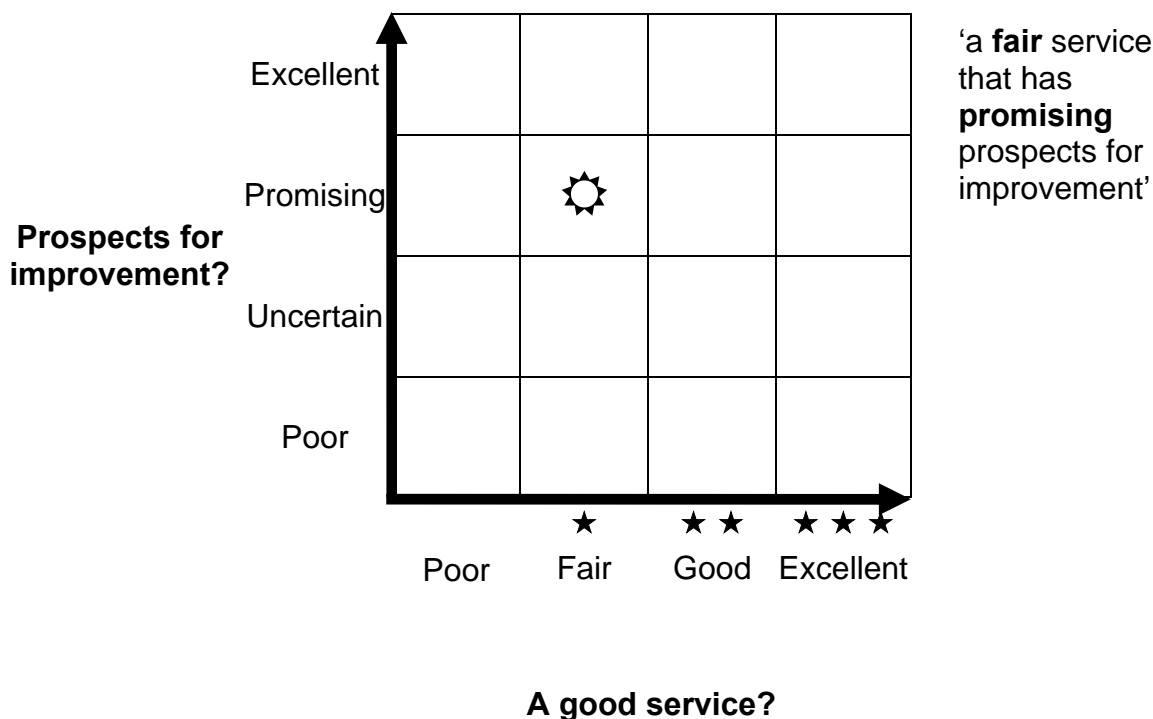
- 1 Cumbria is a county in northwest England. The county covers the district council areas of Allerdale, Barrow-in-Furness, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland. It also includes the Lake District National Park, parts of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and part of a World Heritage Site at Hadrians Wall.
- 2 The population is 488,500; 0.7 per cent are from ethnic minority communities. Cumbria covers the second largest local authority area in England. As such the population density is low - 0.7 persons per hectare compared with a national average of 3.4. More than 50 per cent of the population live in rural areas. Over 24 per cent are aged 60 or over. The resident population is increased substantially by over 15 million visitors each year, the majority travelling by car.
- 3 Cumbria County Council is run by a Cabinet of Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors. No political party has overall control. The Council's mission is:
 

*'As a democratically elected body, we will promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of Cumbria by delivering excellent public services.'*
- 4 Six themes focus on what the Council wants to achieve. The themes include improving council services, enhancing economic well-being, protecting and enhancing the environment and improving the safety of people's lives. A top priority is to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on Cumbria's roads. Key priorities are improving the transport infrastructure and maintaining the county's roads to the best standards possible within the available budget.
- 5 We inspected the Council's Transport Service. The Service includes Highways and Infrastructure, Road Safety and Transport Planning. The Council's Client Services and Economy, Culture and Environment Directorates provide this service in partnership with two private sector organisations. The Council contracts Capita Symonds to handle all design, supervision and other technical work. Amey Infrastructure Services is the Council's highways works contractor. This partnership is called Cumbria Highways, which took effect in April 2005.
- 6 The Service is responsible for 7,700km of roads, a further 7,700km of unsurfaced roads, public footpaths and bridleways, over 40,000 road lights and 1,450 bridges. The Service's net revenue budget (2005/06) is £16.4 million. The capital budget is £22 million. Six Local Area Committees, based on the district council areas, have delegated budgets for the maintenance and improvement of the highways and transport network within their area, except for the capital works programme, winter maintenance, bridges and structures, rights of way and the Windermere Ferry.
- 7 A Property and Transport Services Unit within the Council's Finance and Central Services Directorate procures home to school, special needs and social services transport.

## Scoring the Service

- 8 We have assessed Cumbria County Council as providing a **'fair, one-star'** service that has **promising prospects** for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Table 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>:**



Source: Audit Commission

- 9 The Service is **fair** because it has some strengths, including:
- improved road conditions and reduced numbers of people killed or seriously injured on Cumbria's roads;
  - it understands the needs of citizens and users through a range of consultation mechanisms that informs its development;
  - a single point of contact through a Highways Hotline;
  - community travel schemes that provide access in rural areas;
  - minimising the environmental impacts caused by transport and improving sustainability;

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- prompt responses to emergency situations and dangerous defects;
  - a range of activities to promote road safety; and
  - cost-efficiency, although comparative performance in specific areas is mixed.
- 10** However, some matters need attention, including:
- service standards are not always clearly communicated in terms that users can understand;
  - users are not routinely provided with feedback on individual service requests;
  - users' concerns about public transport, including inconvenient bus timings, punctuality, reliability, facilities and the standard of service;
  - deterioration in public rights of way;
  - half of the road lighting stock is in poor condition;
  - the strategic provision of passenger transport within the Council;
  - maximising opportunities to work with partners to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of road safety activities; and
  - development and implementation of the Council's own travel plans.
- 11** The Service has **promising prospects** for improvement because it can demonstrate:
- a track record of effectively implementing change and improvements in priority areas that have delivered benefits for users, including disadvantaged communities;
  - efficiency savings through externalisation of services and other initiatives;
  - a clear vision, supported by challenging and realistic aims and action plans, through the Cumbria Highways Partnership;
  - it is addressing weaknesses in services, such as a lack of capacity in key areas;
  - good forward planning to ensure that schemes are delivered; and
  - improving performance management arrangements.
- 12** However, some matters need attention, including:
- the track record on tackling some key aspects of performance, such as reducing road accident related deaths, has been weak;
  - the lack of an asset management plan for the transport network;
  - improving co-ordination across portfolios and directorates to ensure delivery against the transport agenda;
  - learning and complaints are not systematically applied to drive service improvements; and
  - the future delivery of activities is dependent on short term funding.

## Recommendations

- 13 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition we identify the approximate costs<sup>1</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context the inspection team recommends that the Council should do the following.

*R1 Publish clear and consistent service standards and outcomes for all highways and transport services.*

The expected **benefits** of this recommendation are:

- clarity about the levels and delivery of services that users can expect;
- to enable performance to be assessed and compared; and
- reduced levels of complaints.

The implementation of this recommendation will have **medium** impact with **low** costs. This should be implemented by **June 2006**.

*R2 Evaluate the ability of the Service to meet the diverse needs of communities within the county.*

The expected **benefits** of this recommendation are:

- improved targeting of resources;
- improved responsiveness to user needs; and
- contribution to wider social cohesion issues.

The implementation of this recommendation will have **medium** impact with **low** costs. This should be implemented by **June 2006**.

*R3 Improve the co-ordination of Cabinet portfolio and management arrangements for driving forward the transport agenda.*

The expected **benefits** of this recommendation are:

- increased impact of strategic leadership;
- clarity of roles at political and operational level; and
- improved co-ordination across portfolios and directorates to ensure delivery against the transport agenda and less duplication of effort.

The implementation of this recommendation will have **high** impact with **low** costs. This should be implemented by **June 2006**.

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<sup>1</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

*R4 Develop and implement transport plans for the Council's own staff that include challenging targets to reduce the demand for travel.*

The expected **benefits** of this recommendation are:

- improved community leadership;
- reduced demand for travel and traffic volumes; and
- contribution to meeting the LTP objectives and targets.

The implementation of this recommendation will have **high** impact with **low** costs. This should be implemented by **March 2007**.

# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 14 Cumbria is a county in northwest England. The county covers the district council areas of Allerdale, Barrow-in-Furness, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland. It includes the Lake District National Park, parts of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and part of a World Heritage Site at Hadrians Wall.
- 15 The population is 488,500, living in 209,000 households; 0.7 per cent are from ethnic minority communities. Cumbria is the second largest local authority area in England. The population density is low - 0.7 persons per hectare compared with a national average of 3.4. More than 50 per cent of the population live in rural areas. Over 24 per cent are aged 60 or over. The resident population is increased substantially by over 15 million visitors each year, the majority travelling by car.
- 16 The county's geography has implications for transport. It takes two hours to drive from Carlisle in the north (the county's administrative centre) to Barrow-in-Furness on the southwest peninsula. Low population densities afford challenges in providing economic public transport services and access to goods and services. Over 63 per cent of the population use a car or van to get to work (national average is 65 per cent), with less than 6 per cent using a bus or train.
- 17 The county's economy has suffered through the decline of traditional industries, such as agriculture and manufacturing. In particular there have been extensive job losses in the chemical, nuclear and shipbuilding industries, with further losses predicted over the next seven years as a result of nuclear decommissioning. Growth in service sectors has not offset this decline. Tourism supports directly or indirectly 18 per cent of jobs in the county. Wages are below the national average. Overall unemployment is below the national and regional averages but, in Barrow-in-Furness and Copeland, is above.
- 18 Cumbria is ranked 84th out of 149 in the indices of deprivation for county council and unitary authorities (with 1 being the most disadvantaged). Its six district areas are ranked from 33rd (Barrow-in-Furness) to 279th (South Lakeland) out of 354 local authorities. Twelve council wards in Allerdale, Barrow, Carlisle and Copeland are amongst the most 10 per cent disadvantaged nationally. Deprivation is largely concentrated in the urban areas but some rural parts are particularly disadvantaged for access to key local services.
- 19 The Cumbria Strategic Partnership, comprising public, private, community and voluntary agencies has produced a sub-regional strategy which articulates a long-term shared vision for the county. The strategy includes nine priority areas for action, including sustainable communities and well-being, strategic communications and rural regeneration.

## The Council

- 20** Cumbria County Council is run by a Cabinet of Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors. No political party has overall control. The Cabinet comprises the Leader, Deputy Leader and eight Portfolio Holders, who have responsibility for service areas or cross-cutting themes. There are eight Scrutiny Committees and Panels and six Local Area Committees, one for each district council area. The Council's mission is stated in its Corporate Strategy 2005-2007:

*'As a democratically elected body, we will promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of Cumbria by delivering excellent public services.'*

- 21** Six themes set out what the Council wants to achieve. The themes include enhancing economic well-being, protecting and enhancing the environment and improving the safety of people's lives. Each theme has a top priority and key priorities. One top priority is to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on Cumbria's roads. Key priorities include improving the transport infrastructure and maintaining the county's roads to the best standards possible within the available budget.
- 22** The Council employs 17,000 staff. Services are delivered by seven Directorates including Client Services and Economy, Culture and Environment. The Council's net revenue budget for 2005/06 is £503 million.

## The Council's Transport Service

- 23** We inspected the Council's Transport Service. This was undertaken at the same time as a wider examination of the approach and impact of the policies and actions of various organisations in addressing road safety in Cumbria. It is intended this work and the inspection will support each other to give a comprehensive view of highways, transport and road safety in Cumbria.
- 24** The Council's Transport Service includes Highways and Infrastructure, Road Safety, Public Transport and Transport Planning. The Council's Client Services and Economy, Culture and Environment Directorates provide this service in partnership with two private sector organisations. The Council contracts Capita Symonds to handle all design, supervision and other technical work. Amey Infrastructure Services is the Council's highways works contractor. This partnership is called Cumbria Highways, which took effect in April 2005.
- 25** The Service is responsible for 7,700km of roads, a further 7,700km of unsurfaced roads, public footpaths and bridleways, over 40,000 road lights and 1,450 bridges. The Highways Agency is responsible for motorways and trunk roads within the county. Carlisle City Council has exercised a statutory right to maintain unclassified roads in its area.

- 26 The Service's net revenue budget (2005/06) is £16.4 million. The capital budget is £22 million. Six Local Area Committees, based on the district council areas, hold budgets for maintaining and improving the highways and transport network within their area, except for the capital works programme, winter maintenance, bridges and structures, rights of way and the Windermere Ferry. In 2005/06 a total of £11.9 million is allocated to Local Area Committees. The Council contributes to the cost of Traveline Cumbria Limited which provides public transport information through a call centre in Whitehaven.
- 27 A Property and Transport Services Unit within the Finance and Central Services Directorate procures home to school, special needs and social services transport.

### **National context**

- 28 Meeting transport needs more effectively is a shared priority agreed by the Government and the Local Government Association. The Government's transport strategy is set out in the White Paper 'the Future of Transport - a network for 2030', published in July 2004. The key themes are reducing the adverse impacts of increased mobility and providing for the increased demand for travel, including:
- a more reliable and freer-flowing road network for personal travel and freight, with people able to make informed choices about how and when they travel;
  - reliable, flexible and convenient bus services, tailored to local needs; and
  - making walking and cycling a real alternative for local trips.
- 29 This strategy complements the Government's ten-year plan – *Transport 2010* - published in 2000, to deliver a quicker, safer, more punctual and environmentally friendly transport system. This plan contained objectives to:
- promote sustainable accessibility and integration of all forms of transport;
  - improve travel safety and security;
  - contribute to an efficient and sustainable economy; and
  - protect and enhance the environment.

Key targets are a 40 per cent reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents, 50 per cent reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured, 8 per cent fall in traffic congestion, 12 per cent increase in the use of public transport by 2010 and to halt road deterioration by 2004.

- 30 Local Transport Plans (LTPs) set out how national and local priorities will be delivered and are a basis for central government funding. The Council produced a LTP for the period 2001 to 2006, which contains its policies, objectives and strategies. It has published and submitted its Provisional LTP for 2006-2011 to the Department for Transport (DfT).

- 31 County councils - as highways and transport authorities - have specific duties to maintain the highway and secure the expeditious movement of traffic on its own roads. They have a duty to provide transport services for children with special educational needs, home-to-school transport for distances over three miles (or where the route to school is unsafe to walk), some social services transport and transport information. Transport authorities can subsidise bus routes that are not commercially viable but for which there is a clear social need. District councils have a duty to operate concessionary fares schemes by which pensioners and disabled people are offered fares at half price or better.

## How good is the Service?

### What has the Service aimed to achieve?

- 32** The service has aimed to achieve the objectives contained in the Council's LTP 2001-2006:
- access to jobs, services, and amenities for all sectors of the community;
  - ensure the effective movement of resources and goods;
  - increase modal choice; and
  - make travel safe.
- 33** These objectives are underpinned by 18 'key' objectives linked to the LTP themes of highway network, public transport, cycling and walking, road traffic, journey to work and school, safety and access and equity. Each objective has associated targets that reflect the Council's and national priorities, for example:
- reducing road accident casualties;
  - improving the condition of all roads and the reliability of journey times; and
  - increasing cycle trips, rural households within 13 minutes walk of an hourly bus service and the use of community transport.
- 34** The Council has a good understanding of the role that transport plays in delivering national, regional corporate and objectives. The LTP links to the Corporate Plan, Structure Plan, Cumbria Community Strategy and Local Strategic Partnerships' community plans. It is consistent with the Regional Transport Strategy and addresses regional economic, health and planning policies and strategies, sustainability and air quality management plans. It has targets to achieve or exceed the national transport objectives, except to halt a decline in bus passenger journeys rather than achieve an increase in public transport usage.
- 35** This understanding has been used to inform the Service's aims, which support the Council's wider corporate objectives relating to community safety, economic development, environmental sustainability and social care. The priority transport issues reflect the diversity of the area and include rural accessibility, routes linking regeneration areas (particularly in west Cumbria) with the national network, sustainable travel options, addressing peak hour traffic congestion and minimising the negative, environmental impacts of transport in tourist areas.
- 36** The Service strengthens community safety strategies through road safety initiatives, urban footpath networks and the provision of road lighting. It is aware, for example, of the link between children in disadvantaged areas and the higher risk of road casualties. The priority that the Council has for reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on Cumbria's roads is demonstrated by a Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) 'stretched' target of a 50 per cent reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on Cumbria's roads.

## Is the Service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

37 We assessed how the Service is meeting the needs of local community and users against three key lines of enquiry:

- access, customer care and user and community focus;
- diversity; and
- service outcomes for users and the community.

### Access, customer care and user and community focus

- 38 The Service employs a range of mechanisms through which individuals, stakeholders and partners can engage with, and contribute to, transport policy. However, the needs of citizens and users are not yet at the heart of design and delivery of the Service, informed by accessibility planning. Other weaknesses are the communication of service standards and making effective use of complaints.
- 39 The Service has a good understanding of users' needs through extensive consultation during preparation of the LTPs. The Council applies rural proofing to ensure policies address local needs and consider potential impacts so that rural areas are not disadvantaged. The Local Government Association recognises the Council's approach as good practice. Procedures are in place to inform users and take their views into account on, for example, traffic management schemes, capital programmes and budget priorities.
- 40 The Service is accessible but users have to wait up to a minute when registering a service request. A Highways Hotline is a single point of contact to report service requests. Users can obtain information by telephone or through the Council's website. A mapping system records the location of defects. This development has resulted in longer waiting times to speak to an officer compared with one year ago when calls were answered immediately. Personal contact is always available as the Hotline is transferred to the Council's Fire Service after office hours.
- 41 Users can track the progress of enquiries through the website. However, the Service does not always clearly inform users on what they can expect nor routinely gives feedback on the outcome of a service request. In contrast the Service keeps the public informed about forthcoming roadworks, through for example, leaflets to householders and the website.
- 42 The website contains a good range of other information about community transport, public transport and timetables (including a journey planner), driver information, cycling and walking and the LTP. It has included road safety advice, for example, a safe driver scheme and a link to an on-line test for motorcyclists, although these pages were not available and under development at the time of the inspection. Documents and information can be downloaded.

- 43 The Council invites compliments, comments and complaints about its services through a customer helpline. Users, who are dissatisfied with the quality of a service, have access to the Council's complaints procedure. The Council has improved its handling of highways related complaints which fell from 70 in 2002/03 to 49 in 2003/04, but it does not currently analyse them to identify potential service improvements. Complaints relating to public transport are investigated with the respective operator.
- 44 The Service has a good understanding of the requirement for accessibility planning. Plans are in place to develop an accessibility strategy for improving access to jobs, education, healthcare and retail and other services in partnership with health authorities, employment services and local planning authorities. The strategy is based on accessibility modelling software developed by the DfT. The Service is undertaking pilots with a local health authority and within a district area to prepare a detailed assessment of needs within this sector and area. However, accessibility planning is not yet being effectively used to meet the needs of all the diverse communities within the county.
- 45 The Service has made good progress in reducing social exclusion by working with partners. However, it is not maximising opportunities to co-ordinate transport provision with district councils on accessing leisure and recreation opportunities, particularly for young people. It understands the needs of people without a car and responds through, for example, subsidised bus services and supporting voluntary car schemes. Its record in developing community transport is good - usage has increased by 42 per cent in the last year. The Rural Wheels scheme collects users from home and takes them to their destination or to the nearest public transport service. The Fellrunner, run by volunteers, has, for over 25 years, provided access within some of the most remote parts of the county. The majority of the community has reasonable access to transport. Just less than 60 per cent of the population are within a 13 minute walk of an hourly or better bus service.
- 46 The Service has not had a significant impact in increasing the wider use of public transport. It has met its target to halt the decline in usage at a level not less than 16 million passenger journeys per year - this target is more realistic for a rural county but not stretching compared with the national target. Bus passenger journeys in the county have declined from 17.8 million in 2002/03 to 16.6 million in 2004/05. The Service is also not on track with its target of two new quality bus routes per year by 2006, although six have been installed.
- 47 The Service's policies recognise the importance of a good quality infrastructure to encourage the use of public transport. Benefits for users include the rail interchange and environmental improvements in Barrow-in-Furness. The Service produces, with transport operators, good quality timetable information for main routes and local and Rambler services, a public transport map and, twice yearly, 'Getting around Cumbria - the Lake District'.

- 48 The Service has comprehensive standards but does not consistently communicate them to users in terms that they can understand. It has not published a simple, clear guide on the standards of service and response times that users can expect, including comparisons with best performing councils, so they can judge the quality of service. This lack of clarity includes who is responsible for maintaining particular roads. In Carlisle, for example, the Council, Carlisle City Council or the Highways Agency may be responsible.
- 49 Standards for highway maintenance and road lighting are contained in a highway maintenance manual. These include response times to defects and local performance indicators relating to network safety, serviceability and sustainability, objectives, policies, strategies and monitoring information for each type of work. The standards are minimum standards that may be increased at the discretion of a Local Area Committee.
- 50 The Service does not publicise the highway maintenance manual standards and targets. It contains much technical detail but parts, including an introduction, have been written with all users in mind. The standards are comprehensive and include for example, environmental maintenance such as dealing with ragwort and other noxious weeds. Some targets are actions or are unclear, such as 'reducing the backlog of structural maintenance work to a sustainable level by 2011/12'.
- 51 Winter maintenance standards are in accordance with a prioritised hierarchy of routes, reviewed and published annually. All users are made aware through 'Your Cumbria' - the Council's newspaper. Guides on the standards of verge maintenance and 'Farming and the Public Highway' are published. A 'Cumbria rights of way' information pack sets out the rights and responsibilities of countryside users. Standards and response times are communicated for complaint handling.
- 52 The Service has clear policies on the provision and maintenance of direction signs for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians and for tourist signs. These are set out in the manual and in work instructions. The quality of signs is generally good and they are kept free of obstructing vegetation. Road markings are variable and generally clear on main routes with some badly faded areas on other roads.
- 53 The Service has appropriate arrangements for consulting, engaging and communicating with users and non-users. It knows the priorities of the local community, users' satisfaction with transport services and issues of concern and responds by, for example, amending winter gritting routes. It undertook extensive consultation for the Provisional LTP 2006-2011 and distributed good quality leaflets within each district, inviting views and ideas on key transport themes. The Service used feedback to, for example, inform area transport plans and place more emphasis on environmental issues. It provided responses to all comments expressed by local people and other stakeholders.

- 54 Work instructions set out clear guidance on consultation for highways works, major projects, traffic regulation and calming schemes and include a comprehensive list of potential consultees. The Service consults with local people before and after trialling schemes, such as traffic management in Kendal and Carlisle, or with directly affected bodies, for example, the local parish council on the Windermere ferry. In 2004 the Council used a SIMALTO survey to inform the budget. This showed that users place a high priority, for example, on winter maintenance. In October 2005 the Service used Community Voice - the Council's Citizens Panel - to determine current views about public transport and highways.
- 55 Users can influence highways and transport priorities through Local Area Committees, Neighbourhood Forums and Area Transport Advisory Groups. In some areas the Council has undertaken a detailed survey - 'Your future in your hands' - to determine local views on services, including roads and transport. Where appropriate the Service engages with specific interest groups, for example, Disability Action Cumbria and the Cumbria Cycle Panel.
- 56 The website invites comments about highways, transport and traffic management through the completion of an on-line survey or comments page. All parish councils and neighbourhood forums have access to programme information. However, although this information is available, parish councils do have concerns about the overall effectiveness of communication in relation to highways issues.

## Diversity

- 57 Service delivery embraces equality and diversity to ensure that users or potential users have adequate opportunities for fair and equal access either now or in the future. The Service is addressing the needs of minority user groups, including bus users - particularly in rural areas - motor cyclists, cyclists and equestrians. Policies require all new highways schemes to include cycle and safety audits and make provision for horse safety. The West Cumbria and Pennine cycleways are accessible in places for passage by horses. Walkers, cyclists and horse riders, but not motor vehicles can use public rights of way. The Services provides road safety education within some disadvantaged communities.
- 58 The Service engages proactively with local disability groups and access officers to develop policy and design and transport schemes. The LTP contains specific policies to address the needs of people with disabilities. The commercial bus operator has introduced low floor buses to improve access to people with disabilities. However, only 16 per cent of the local bus fleet is fully accessible to meet the needs of people with impaired mobility. Over 91 per cent of pedestrian crossings have facilities for people with disabilities. This is below average.
- 59 The Service works effectively with district councils on concessionary fare schemes. It is leading the development of the NoWcard project across Cumbria and Lancashire, involving 10 bus operators and 20 concessionary local authorities. This is an electronic smart card scheme to support a fully integrated transport fares system.

- 60 The Service contributes to meeting the transport needs of young people. The Wheels to Work scheme in Copeland provides mopeds to young people between 16 and 20 who require transport to employment, training or further education where there is no suitable public transport.

### **Service outcomes for users and the community**

- 61 Overall the Service is being effective in meeting local and national objectives. The Government Office for the North West (GONW) has assessed that in 2004/05 the Council made fair progress towards implementing its first LTP. It is on course to achieve the majority of the core and local indicator targets in the LTP programme. In 2004/05, despite the distraction of flooding in north Cumbria, the Service progressed a range of initiatives such as the Carlisle Northern Development Route, Kendal town centre traffic scheme, overhaul of the Windermere ferry, and other integrated transport, highway maintenance, bridge strengthening and road safety schemes.
- 62 The resource allocation and integrated transport and maintenance programmes reflect priorities. The Service prioritises transport schemes against the key LTP objectives, indicators and targets to achieve the greatest impact. It has a preparation pool budget to ensure schemes are ready to proceed when funding is available. This forward planning means that a scheme can be delivered within the capital programme when an original, planned scheme is deferred due to external influences.
- 63 The Service recognises the role that transport plays in a range of functions, objectives and priorities. This is reflected in its planning and delivery of services with impacts in some areas. It contributes to cross-cutting and non-transport objectives, such as improving health and community safety, supporting the local economy and regeneration. However, cross-cutting work is not fully developed across all aspects of transport services to maximise opportunities such as the integration of education and social services transport with wider public and community transport.

### **Reducing the need to travel**

- 64 Progress in reducing the need to travel and providing alternatives to the car is mixed. The Service has made good progress in developing school travel plans and has exceeded its target. However, it did not meet its original target for workforce travel plans. The target has been revised to increase the number of employees covered by a travel plan by from 3,000 to 13,000 by 2011. The Council's Code of Practice for Highway Authority Input to Development Control makes explicit the need for employers to develop travel plans as part of any transport assessment. The LTP contains a range of policies on land use and development to promote an integrated approach to sustainable transport policies and reflects district council's adopted local plans.

- 65 The Council is not providing community leadership in that it does not have a county-wide travel plan for its own staff. They have minimal encouragement to use more sustainable modes of travel. The Kendal work place travel plan, which includes its own offices, has not been monitored. In contrast its highways partner has encouraged staff to use more environmentally friendly transport, with a 30 per cent take-up. A free shoppers bus at Christmas resulted in a 40 per cent increase in usage.
- 66 The Service has made variable progress with its cycling and walking strategies. It has delivered some improved facilities, such as new and better cycleways and is on track for its target of 50 km of new cycleway per year. At three Carlisle schools there has been a 300 per cent increase in cycling. However, cycling trips (at a representative number of counting points) is not increasing. Previous targets (to double the 2002/03 levels of cycling by 2010) were unrealistically ambitious. The Service is now aiming for a more realistic 10 per cent growth on 2002 levels by 2011. A Cycling Action Plan is being implemented with partners. It includes national best practice. The approach is to prioritise urban networks to maximise the environmental, health and congestion benefits of cycling.
- 67 However, whilst the Council has made improvements to countryside access the percentage of the rights of way network which was easy to use fell from 60 per cent to 54 per cent between 2003/04 and 2004/05, due to reductions in areas covered by the claimed rights arrangements and in a national park. The low level of maintenance over many years has also resulted in a poor and deteriorating performance putting the Council amongst the worst 25 per cent.

### **Congestion**

- 68 The Service has an understanding of what congestion is and where it causes disruption. It takes action to address congestion in key locations through new schemes. These include a new radial route in Carlisle, where there are significant problems, and a traffic management scheme in Kendal. Schemes are trialled to determine the best solution for a locality, having regard to users' views. Congestion is managed by changing the timings of traffic signals and controlled crossings to reduce delays and frustration to motorists. The Service measures congestion and is on track for a journey times target on key routes to be reliable within 10 per cent of the average over the LTP period. However, in 2003/04, 66 per cent of residents considered that traffic congestion in their area was getting worse and only 4 per cent said it was getting better. The Better Ways to Schools (BWTS) programme contributes to reducing congestion around schools.
- 69 The Service achieves economies of scale, minimises disruption, wasted activity and resources and avoids bad publicity by not making repeated visits to the same site through its management of roadworks. Highway maintenance work is co-ordinated with other work, for example, traffic management and BWTS programmes.

### **Air quality and sustainability**

- 70** Local transport planning is linked to an air quality regime. Air quality is not a major issue in Cumbria but, where identified as a problem, is successfully managed by traffic management. In such circumstances the Service works well with Environmental Health Officers in district councils. The Kendal traffic scheme brought air quality back to within acceptable standards at a key thoroughfare. It has also improved bus reliability and the environment for pedestrians and cyclists without the congestion predicted. This scheme contributes to meeting the LTP objective of a traffic free town centre and increased use of sustainable modes of transport. The Service evaluates opportunities for park and ride schemes to reduce congestion and improve air quality.
- 71** The Service minimises environmental impacts through, for example, the use of recycled glass in carriageway resurfacing schemes. It gives due consideration to factors which influence sustainability, serviceability and safety, appropriate to the local environment. Verge maintenance is subject to a cutting regime that is designed to protect rare species and sustain wildlife corridors, whilst promoting safety for road users and pedestrians. This has been recognised by a Green Apple award. Sustainability is a key theme in the Service's highway maintenance policies and strategies, which emphasise the conservation of natural assets and biodiversity. The Council is committed to minimising energy consumption for road lighting and using energy from renewable sources.

### **Condition of the highway**

- 72** The Service has improved road conditions but the quality is variable across the county. The quality of road lighting is also variable. Half of the lighting stock is past its design life and, in the south of the county, is generally in poor condition.
- 73** The condition of principal roads is better than average. Surveys in 2004/05 show that structural maintenance should be considered for 36.6 per cent of the principal road network. This cannot be compared with previous years' performance due to changes in the survey methodology. The condition of non-principal classified roads has improved to 9.2 per cent requiring structural maintenance from 17.7 per cent in 2003/04 and 22.7 per cent in 2002/03. This means that the Council is now amongst the best 25 per cent. During the same period the condition of unclassified roads improved to 16 per cent from 34.4 per cent and is now close to the median. The condition of surface footways is such that structural maintenance should be considered for 26.4 per cent - a decline from 16 per cent in 2003/04. This is worse than average.
- 74** Potholes, edge deterioration, localised flooding and mud are problems on country lanes. The quality of patching is mixed, but in some areas, utility companies have had to resurface lengths of road to a good standard when reinstatements have been poor. Effective streetworks management systems are in place and the number of failed reinstatements is reducing.

- 75 The Service responds promptly to emergency situations and dangerous defects on roads, footways and cycleways. Over 95 per cent are made safe within 24 hours. Other defects take longer depending on the degree of risk. Following the severe floods in January 2005 the Service repaired all damaged traffic signals, controllers and communications systems within two weeks. Over 98 per cent of winter maintenance routes are gritted within five hours. To prevent road surfaces breaking up and becoming viscous during hot weather the Service has deployed road gritters to spread crushed rock dust. The average time to repair road light outages (other than network problems) is 4.6 days, within the five day target.
- 76 The Service has been successful in reducing the number of successful claims for alleged failure to maintain the highway. It has a robust approach to inspections through risk based intervention standards, clear policies and procedures. Over 82 per cent of claims are repudiated. However, the Service has not yet developed an asset management plan for the network.

### **Road safety**

- 77 The Service is achieving casualty reductions through a range of engineering, education and enforcement initiatives. Whilst there is overall success and progress towards the national targets, it is not track to meet the stretched LPSA target. The effectiveness of some road safety initiatives is not clear.
- 78 The number of people killed or seriously injured (KSIs) on roads in Cumbria reduced by 19 per cent from 555 (1994-98 average) to 434 in 2004. However, the number of road accident related deaths is increasing. The average number of slight road traffic injuries (SLIs) per year has increased by 3 per cent in line with the national trend, particularly involving two wheeled vehicles. In the same period the number of children killed or seriously injured reduced by 22 per cent from 68 to 53, although 2004/05 was the highest for four years. Overall child KSIs have reduced by 32 per cent compared to the 1994-98 average.
- 79 Whilst there has been an overall reduction in casualties, relative performance for categories of injuries is variable. In 2003/04 Cumbria was better than the averages for pedestrians, pedal cyclists and users of two wheeled vehicles KSIs or SLIs. The county was in the worst 25 per cent for car users and other road users KSI and SLI.
- 80 The Service delivers road safety education and programmes through schools and other forums. Programmes link to national campaigns, including BWTS, 'It wouldn't kill you' and 'Be safe be seen'. The Service targets groups to change attitudes to road safety, for example, motor cyclists, van and haulage drivers, or issues such as drink driving.
- 81 The Service has developed a website and schools pack to increase school travel plans - 136 of the county's 342 (40 per cent) schools have travel plans. BWTS and road safety initiatives address casualty reduction around schools. They encourage modal shift and give special consideration to Cumbria's most deprived areas but impacts are not always evaluated.

The Respect programme, delivered initially in deprived areas of Barrow-in-Furness, has been extended into other parts of west and north Cumbria. Since the launch of this programme in February 2004 there has been one KSI in the targeted area compared with 16 over a previous five year period. The Service provides cycle training, proficiency tests for children and information packs. In 2004/05 36 per cent of year 6 children received training.

- 82 The Service and its partners have been effective in the use of speed cameras, which are deployed at accident locations around the county. Accidents at such sites have reduced by 70 per cent.
- 83 The overall effectiveness of engineering safety schemes is not clear. Evaluation is based on pure casualty numbers and does not take into account fluctuations and local trends. Schemes are carried out where personal injury collisions have reached a pre-determined intervention level. If a location falls below the intervention level a danger reduction scheme is introduced. The Service has a programme to address accident sites. It has introduced safety measures at hotspots by, for example, removing a bend or laying an anti-skidding surface. Other schemes include 20mph limits and home zones.
- 84 Traffic calming schemes have had varied levels of effectiveness but all have accomplished at least part of their objectives. Some are highly effective in reducing speed and enforcing a 20mph zone but others have not reduced traffic volumes. One scheme was unpopular with local people due to increased noise resulting from the design. Although Local Area Committees could influence safety schemes through delegated budgets and the annual package of measures resources are not allocated on the basis of KSIs. Road safety initiatives do not always connect well with local communities.

### **User experience and satisfaction**

- 85 User experience of, and satisfaction with, the Service is mixed. Quarterly surveys show that users of the Highways Hotline rate the overall service as good to excellent. High percentages of users rate various aspects of this service as good to excellent, including accessibility (85 per cent), speed (91 per cent) and quality of response (97.5 per cent), the way the call was handled (95.5 per cent), the timescale for completion of works (87.5 per cent), standard of workmanship (60.5 per cent) and the manner in which the work was carried out (77.5 per cent). Seventy five per cent of users are satisfied with highway designs.
- 86 User experience and satisfaction are more apparent in some areas. For example, people in Denton Holme and Longsowerby are concerned about cars driving too fast, illegal parking, riding bicycles on the pavement, overgrown plants and weeds on footpath verges and the quality of cycle paths. Less than half are satisfied with the condition of road surfaces and provision of car parking spaces.

- 87 Users generally do not have difficulty in accessing transport information and it meets expectations. In 2003/04 52 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the local provision of public transport information - this was better than average. The quality of customer service at the local Traveline call centre and accuracy of information are good, with a low percentage of abandoned calls. However, users do have concerns about inconvenient bus service timings, regular travel routes not being covered, connectivity between transport modes and the cost of bus travel. Punctuality, reliability, facilities and the standard of service are other concerns. In 2003/04, 55 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the local bus service, which was average. Only 57 per cent of residents were satisfied with the frequency of buses which was amongst the worst 25 per cent; 34 per cent said that public transport was getting worse and 9 per cent said it was getting better.
- 88 Users of the Windermere ferry, mainly visitors, consider that this service is good or excellent, although waiting times are a problem in summer. At such times the Service abandons the timetable and operates to clear queues.

### **Is the Service delivering value for money?**

- 89 We considered how:
- the Service's costs compare to others, allowing for local context, performance and policy choices; and
  - value for money is managed, including through partnership and procurement and taking a long-term view.

### **How do the Service's costs compare?**

- 90 The Service's costs compare favourably to other county councils, allowing for local context, performance and policy choices. The costs of the transport and policy and strategy functions per head of population are in the cheapest 25 per cent of county councils. The cost of highways is below the median. The comparison with the Council's 'nearest neighbours' is similar, with the exception of policy and strategy where expenditure is higher relative to the group. For highways and public transport the costs are even lower relative to the group.
- 91 The Council spends between the median and cheapest 25 per cent on roads and bridges construction/routine maintenance and other traffic management/road safety. The cost of public transport overall is below the cheapest 25 per cent. The Council is also in the cheapest 25 per cent for spending on other transport services.
- 92 Benchmarking with 28 county councils shows that the Council spends the least, total revenue on local bus services, community transport and per head of population. It spends the least per head on local bus support and is 15th out of 28 on community transport spending. Its rural bus support (£3.35) is the lowest compared with an average of £5.81 and is nearly half some of its nearest neighbours.

- 93 These costs compare favourably with other councils providing similar levels and standards of services, allowing for the local context, for example, the transport costs associated with rurality and the length of roads to be maintained. The total distance of roads maintained is the fifth longest of 16 'nearest neighbours' yet safety maintenance expenditure per km is the fourth lowest. The costs are commensurate with service delivery and outcomes but comparative performance is mixed, ranging from the best 25 per cent for non-principal classified roads to amongst the worst 25 per cent for footpaths. Positive impacts are not being achieved in all service areas. Public transport costs are below the cheapest quartile and, although satisfaction is overall better than average, users do have concerns.
- 94 Overall this represents reasonable value for money and cost-efficiency when considered against the relative and historically low level of expenditure. The revenue spend on roads and bridges reduced from £20.2 million in 2002/03 to £16.6 million in 2003/04 due to changes in funding formulae. The revenue budget for 2004/05 was £17.1 million. This does not include inflation in the construction industry which reduces the value further.
- 95 The Service knows the overall cost-benefit of road safety activities in terms of a KSI. However, it is not clear that the balance between education, engineering and enforcement approaches is yielding the best value for money.
- 96 The Service allocates resources in accordance with policy decisions to target and deliver priorities, which has resulted in some improved outcomes. Over the last three years there has been a significant shift from revenue to capital expenditure with a larger proportion of maintenance work being funded from capital resources. This has enabled declining revenue funds to be offset, thereby reducing the decline in expenditure on maintenance work. Capital spending decisions are taken with full information on the revenue implications and financial forecasts of their longer term impact to enhance the serviceability and safety of the network.
- 97 The Council has clear and accurate information on overall service and unit costs, but not how these compare to other councils, and how this relates to the quality of services. As such any differences are not understood and used to review cost-effectiveness, strategically manage resources, improve specific outcomes and demonstrate value for money.

#### **How is value for money managed?**

- 98 The Council manages value for money through partnership, procurement and taking a long-term view. Procurement strategies fully embrace and practically apply partnering and other modern frameworks. The Council considers whole life costs when entering into long-term strategic partnerships.

- 99 The Service has secured efficiency through strategic partnering. It uses good procurement practice and makes transparent decisions on an objective basis. Management arrangements include internal and external review mechanisms to focus on value for money and improve cost-effectiveness. A service group has a remit to 'design and recommend an effective and efficient high level highways maintenance contract administration process which focuses on the delivery of value for money services through streamlined business processes'.
- 100 External challenge is part of the Council's Invest to Save and Aiming for Excellence programmes. In 2004 the Council commissioned Current Performance and Improvement Assessments (CPIAs) for road safety, highways maintenance, and the structure of the Community, Economy and Environment Directorate. This series of reviews and assessments was designed to address under-performing services and make recommendations to increase the effectiveness of service delivery and improve outcomes. They also complement internal review mechanisms such as the Environmental Quality & Safety Scrutiny Panel Select Committee on Road Safety.
- 101 Cumbria Highways provides the opportunity to ensure that Service and its partners work with Local Area Committees to deliver an effective service. The contract for highways (and construction) services demonstrates savings of £7 million over the next seven years. It also generated £8 million of capital receipts and transferred risks.
- 102 Some £172,000 was saved in 2004/05 through the pro-active management of remedial work carried out by utility companies, bridge strengthening and the weather forecast contract. The dial-up signal control costs in Kendal have generated savings in annual running costs. The proactive approach to risk management on highways inspections is saving the Council some £400,000 a year compared with the cost of claims in 1999. This enables resources to be deployed in other service areas for the benefit of users.
- 103 The Service considers options for joint procurement. It works with partners to improve value, such as the consortia for the road lighting energy contract. As a result improvements in value for money have been achieved through the partnerships whilst improving service quality. This has been recognised, for example, by users contacting the Highways Hotline. Value for money considerations focus on the costs and benefits to the customer. However, it is not clear that users recognise that services have been designed to best meet their needs and aspirations within the financial constraints.
- 104 The Service is not using benchmarking effectively across all service areas to improve performance and value for money. It has some information on relative costs but this is not consistent. Comparative information is generally restricted to analysis of best value performance indicators and is not used in a consistent and comprehensive manner to review value for money.

- 105** The Council uses the budget process to review costs and reallocate resources in line with corporate priorities. However, cost information is not always linked to changes in performance, achievement of corporate priorities or impact on users and the community. As such there is limited evidence of high quality/low cost. Performance management systems continue to be developed, but do not link activity and cost to establish whether value for money is being achieved. The main focus is costs rather than outcomes and impact.
- 106** Management of the LTP programme is good. In 2004/05 bus infrastructure schemes were delivered at lower than predicted costs through incorporation with other schemes. The Service brought forward planned road crossings improvements from future years and incorporated them in a resurfacing scheme that secured additional safety and accessibility benefits. However, some programmes were delayed as a result of flooding which means that the priority funding in the 2005/06 capital programme needed to be allocated for schemes not delivered. The Service generally completes projects on time and within budget and can account for any deviations.

### Summary

- 107** The needs of citizens and users are not yet at the heart of design and delivery of the Service although it has a good understanding of local needs. The Service is accessible and responsive but there are weaknesses in customer care. Service standards are comprehensive and reflect users' concerns but are not always clearly articulated. The Service has appropriate arrangements for consulting with, engaging and communicating with users. Service delivery embraces equality and diversity so that most users or potential users have fair access.
- 108** Service outcomes for the community are being delivered across a range of activities through delivery of the LTP programme, although the Council is not demonstrating community leadership through its own travel plans. Generally the Service is delivering what it promised and is being effective in meeting local, regional and national objectives. User experience and satisfaction with the quality of service is mixed, with particular concerns about public transport.
- 109** Overall the Service is delivering reasonable value for money in terms of cost-efficiency but the main focus is costs rather than outcomes. Costs compare favourably to other councils, allowing for local context, performance and policy choices but comparative performance is variable. The Service manages value for money through partnership, procurement and taking a long-term view.
- 110** We judge Cumbria County Council's Transport Service to be a **fair, one-star** service.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the Service?

111 In assessing the prospects for improvement to the Service we considered the following.

- What is the service track record in delivering improvement?
- How well does the Service manage performance?
- Does the Service have the capacity to improve?

### What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 112 The Service has an overall track record of delivering improvement but this is variable across specific areas. It can evidence a record of effectively implementing change that has led to improvements in service delivery and delivered benefits for users, such as the Highways Hotline. These changes are derived from a best value review of Highway Maintenance, inspections, external assessments and service planning. However, changes do not satisfy all users, who judge quality according to their own experiences such as a trial traffic management scheme in Carlisle.
- 113 The Service has responded to recommendations made in the Highways Maintenance inspection in 2001 but progress has been slow. It now places more emphasis on consultation with local people to inform them about schemes and improve outcomes. Performance indicators have not yet been developed to monitor all service outcomes including customer satisfaction.
- 114 The Service has delivered improved outcomes that would be experienced by users, including those in some disadvantaged communities (for example road safety casualty reductions) and increased access for rural communities. Other outcomes, which have contributed to the achievement of the service aims, are new or improved cycle tracks or footways, school safety zones and increased non-car journeys to schools through travel plans. These intended outcomes have had a positive impact, largely within the set timescales, except where external influences, such as flooding in 2005, have prevented delivery.
- 115 The externalisation of services was effectively managed through mobilisation teams working on the practical aspects of transfer in April 2005. The achievements of Cumbria Highways have, to date, largely been concentrated on processes and developing the new working structures and partnership arrangements. The improvements and changes it set out to achieve have not yet been completed or resulted in the outcomes that the partnership envisages.
- 116 The overall direction of travel of key performance indicators over the last three years is towards improvement, particularly in priority areas that matter to users, but some have not been sustained. Most performance indicators are improving. The condition of principal roads improved in 2003/04 following deterioration in 2002/03.

The conditions of non-principal and unclassified roads have improved since 2002. The percentage of pedestrian crossing with facilities for disabled people has increased to 91.9 per cent. However, except for an increase in satisfaction with the provision of public transport information, it is not clear that these measurable changes are resulting in an increase in user satisfaction. The Service is on track for the majority of the LTP targets but not the LPSA target.

- 117** Trends in comparative performance are variable. The condition of principal roads is relatively the same: relative condition of non-principal classified roads has improved to be amongst the best 25 per cent: condition of unclassified roads has improved to below average: condition of footways is now below average compared with better than average in 2003/04: percentage of footpaths easy to use is now amongst the worst 25 per cent: and pedestrian crossings with disabled facilities have fallen from the best 25 per cent to below average. The relative position for the percentage reduction of KSIs has improved, but not for SLIs, based on a three year rolling average compared to the 1994-98 average.
- 118** The Service has a track record of improving value for money over time through efficiency savings generated by the externalisation of functions. It has a focus on value for money in strategic decision-making and embeds this, and procurement principles, within core service aims and objectives, articulated in service planning. It makes sound investment and procurement decisions and takes into account the long-term costs of actions and the interests of service users as, for example, in selecting the highway maintenance contractor.

### **How well does the Service manage performance?**

- 119** We considered the following.
- How good is the Service's improvement planning?
  - Are there arrangements and culture in place to support continuous improvement?

### **How good is the Service's improvement planning?**

- 120** The Service has strengthened its arrangements for managing performance and improvement planning. It has a clear vision which sets out what it wants to achieve over the long-term:

*'Our vision is a transport network in Cumbria that provides safe access for all to jobs and services, supports a dynamic, sustainable economy, maintains and improves the quality of the built and natural environment and contributes to better public health.'*

- 121** This vision is translated into tangible ambitions, aims and objectives for the future of the Service and into specific priorities for the short, medium and long-term. The Provisional LTP 2006-2011 sets out the Service's objectives in terms of facilitating economic development and regeneration, providing access to jobs and services, improving health and the quality of people's lives and protecting the wider environment.

### 30 Cumbria Environment - Transport | What are the prospects for improvement to the Service?

The plan identifies measures that will be used to assess progress but some key measures such as 'improve the transport infrastructure' are not identified. GONW has assessed the Provisional LTP 2006-2011 as promising but some aspects need further development.

- 122 The Service now has realistic aims, which aspire to make a real and measurable difference for service users, particularly the most vulnerable. They identify the sustainable outcomes that can be achieved over the next 5-10 years relating to road safety, traffic management, reducing car journeys, community and public transport, increased local bus patronage, cycling, countryside access and walking, highway network and land use and development. However, targets for improvement are not always challenging and consistent with the best 25 per cent of councils. The approach to implementing transport improvements is set out in Area Transport Statements, one for each district.
- 123 The Service's plans address corporate and national priorities to enable the achievement of wider aims relating to social inclusion and accessibility. Tackling accessibility and passenger transport have a high profile in the community strategy. The draft Regional Spatial Strategy acknowledges the importance of passenger transport in accessing key services and employment.
- 124 The Service has developed its aims based on a sound knowledge of the challenges and opportunities faced, including the views and needs of users. It has taken account of the realistic expectations of communities and other stakeholders, together with the needs of the local economy and environmental requirements. The Service engages with a wide range of local people and stakeholders through local area committees, neighbourhood forums, parish councils, partners and with those affected by particular schemes. Engagement with users during the preparation of the draft LTP has ensured that relevant issues of concern are considered, in order that some consensus and commitment from stakeholders can be achieved. The wide range of research and information to understand local needs provides a good basis for clear priorities.
- 125 The Service has integrated its priorities into service and other plans, which link to corporate priorities. The plans set out the practical tasks necessary to achieve the aims and objectives for the Service. These plans set a framework for the delivery of user-focused achievements in the longer term. There are links between corporate aims through to service and individual plans, objectives, standards, priorities and targets. This means that individuals know what is expected of them and how their work contributes to overall aims.
- 126 Some actions will directly deliver improvements for users, such as the Cycling Action Plan and developing community travel plans, whilst other are intended to strengthen arrangements and procedures that will ultimately result in improvements to facilities and increased usage. For example, proposed actions in, or relating to the LTP include studies relating to park and ride schemes, piloting Real Time public transport in Carlisle, considering quality bus partnerships and reviewing the Council's passenger transport. As such some actions in future plans are not outcome-focused.

- 127 The LTP is supported by service and action plans, strategies and targets that cover the objectives. In 2003 the Service revised its original objectives and targets to provide more focus on outcomes. It set new targets relating to cycling trips, which were initially aspirational, traffic reduction and employees covered by travel plans. As a result the Council received a performance bonus of £126,000.
- 128 Service plans are realistic about what can be achieved in the short, medium and long term, taking into account its strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and threats. They address weaknesses such as a lack of capacity in key areas. They also reflect the need to prepare for forthcoming legislation and other initiatives, for example, a greater emphasis on accessibility planning and to develop asset management. The accessibility strategy will set standards, including for disadvantaged groups, by working with partners. This represents a change to an outcome-led approach to tackle problems and determining why journeys need to be made so that users are able to reach facilities and places by sustainable modes of travel. The plans contain actions, timescales and responsibilities so that performance can be measured.
- 129 The aims and future plans are co-ordinated and deliverable but are dependent on funding. Corporate, financial and service plans are integrated to ensure the best use of resources. Local Area Committees approve schemes in advance so that they can proceed once funding is approved through the LTP settlement and the Council's budget. The Service brings forward schemes from future years to manage spending and to meet targets. This approach helps the Service to demonstrate better value for money in its planning and delivery.
- 130 The Service does not have specific clear proposals for meeting efficiency targets and improving value for money beyond those generated by the Highways Partnership. The Council uses the budget process to challenge the allocation of resources to priority areas. However, it has not yet considered how resources can be used to improve areas of lower performance. Service plans refer to efficiency savings to achieve a three year financial target and setting targets in general terms but these are not quantified.

**Are there arrangements and a culture in place to support continuous improvement?**

- 131 Arrangements and a culture are largely in place to support continuous improvement. The Service has active, visible and effective management and leadership, recognised by staff, partners and other stakeholders. Leadership, from senior managers and councillors sets the tone of the organisation and is creating a climate of openness, transparency and mutual respect. A Highways Partnership Board, supported by an Operational Steering Group, provides the strategic direction and leadership for a high level overview of service delivery.
- 132 Councillors and managers have demonstrated their willingness to take difficult decisions though the externalisation of services and manage a complex change process. The leadership style has improved with good examples of cross working between services. The Service has a good understanding of the environment in which it operates and its clients' needs. It further demonstrates its leadership through fair access to services and promoting sustainable communities.

## 32 Cumbria Environment - Transport | What are the prospects for improvement to the Service?

- 133 Councillors and managers have communicated the vision, aims and priorities so that staff and partners have a good understanding and are clear about the culture and values of the organisation necessary for delivery. Work instructions and programmes set out performance management procedures, for example, for highways safety inspections, verge maintenance and assessing the priority of schemes. Rigid monitoring of utility companies has improved their performance.
- 134 Overall the Service has an adequate track record of financial management and can demonstrate that resources are used flexibly in line with priorities. It undertakes detailed financial planning to deliver its service aims and priorities within the framework of the LTP process and the Council's capital and revenue programmes. It moves resources away from areas that are not priorities or where development is not needed. Delivery against the LTP has improved in terms of the delivery of structural maintenance schemes and spending budgets. However, there are weaknesses. The cost of winter maintenance consistently exceeds the budget. LPSA monies were underspent in the first two years of the agreement with a lack of future planning.
- 135 The Service has strengthened its performance management arrangements in line with a corporate framework. The arrangements provide a basis to monitor progress and review impact. Managers, councillors, board members and staff are clear about their roles in performance management. They maintain a strategic focus on delivery against established plans, standards, targets and deadlines, especially where these are not being met, take corrective action in response to variations in performance and review progress. The Service has introduced a balanced scorecard to measure operational performance and ensure that it has 'trained and motivated staff, doing the right things to meet customers' needs and meeting our financial targets'. However, staff are not always supported to perform to the best of their abilities through training and development opportunities.
- 136 The Service produces regular, performance information through a range of monitoring mechanisms, including Performance Groups and the Highways Partnership Board. Revenue and capital measures show progress against planned expenditure. This is tailored to risk and enables officers, councillors and board members to understand reasons for variations against targets but not how performance compares to other service providers. Work programmes are transparent - reports to Local Area Committees contain details of progress on local schemes. The Service has a range of complementary mechanisms to help it to sustain its focus on priority areas through, for example, agendas, forward planning, project and review groups, scrutiny mechanisms, internal and external audit, and user involvement.
- 137 The monitoring reports cover most relevant aspects of performance, but information is not always explained in terms that users can understand and is generally contained in formal reports, such as the LTP Annual Progress Reports. This means that it is not easy for users to judge the quality of service and the progress that is being made. 'Your Cumbria' includes details of services but not performance information, nor is this published regularly on its website.

Although relevant information is included in reports the format does not readily give a comprehensive overview of how well the Service is delivering against corporate and service objectives, the national agenda and local priorities. The Annual Road Safety Statement, for example, does not link initiatives, performance, budget and outcomes to show the impact achieved.

- 138** Whilst progress has been made in developing performance management within the Service, there are weaknesses. The Service has not yet developed an asset management plan, underpinned by a robust inventory that connects performance priorities and targets to programmes and resources. It recognises the need to do so to support a medium-term strategy. Until this is in place the Service cannot be absolutely clear that it is targeting resources to achieve maximum impact or that resources are being allocated to overall need. This inhibits effective decision-making. Performance information is not actively used to prioritise funding or other interventions for passenger transport.
- 139** The performance management arrangements provide a framework to drive and deliver improved value for money. Councillors and managers used information on costs and the quality of services to determine the cost-benefits of externalisation. However, they are not routinely challenging how costs compare to others, currently and over time, to actively manage costs and quality and review performance. The Council's approach to assessing the benefits of partnership in delivering value for money is generally weak but is developing.
- 140** In the last year the Service has improved its learning from high performers (for example, on passenger transport), users' feedback, (such as the public transport survey) and its own experience through internal and external assessments. It now understands its strengths and weaknesses in the context of the challenges it faces. It demonstrates a good level of self-awareness.
- 141** The Service understands the benefits of working with others to compare and evaluate processes, costs and outcomes, but its approach is at times piecemeal and/or results are not always fully considered and used to inform improvement planning. It does not make best use of opportunities to learn from other organisations, as for example, on developing cycling action plans through benchmarking with other councils.
- 142** The Council has an adequate system in place to receive complaints, grievances or representations. While procedures for dealing with these are followed, the Service is not systematically using this feedback and learning to improve services. The Service provides limited opportunity for stakeholders to influence which targets are set, and how performance is measured and monitored. Service standards are incomplete and not all are readily available.

### **Does the Service have the capacity to improve?**

- 143 The Service has the capacity to improve. It has strengthened its 'client' role to manage the delivery of projects. This had been a significant weakness. Internally and through partners, it has access to the appropriate skills, tools and finances to deliver improvement, through forward planning. It is taking a more strategic approach in service delivery rather than being focused on day-to-day management. However, the transport agenda is not being driven forward in an integrated manner at member level. Three portfolio holders, each responsible for a corporate theme, are accountable for the delivery of highways and transport services. Local Area Committees are effective in addressing specific, local needs but are not specifically influencing the overall strategic direction.
- 144 The Service makes good use of information and communications technology to deliver service objectives and improvements, for example, data capturing devices on bridge inspections, variable car parking message signs and the TRADS county-wide traffic monitoring scheme. It is used to achieve efficiencies in operations (for example, shared access to project data), and provide management information about service users, but not specifically non-users. However, developments are not part of an integrated approach to improving access for users and potential users.
- 145 The Service can evidence effective human resource planning. It is maximising internal capacity to ensure that future service developments are provided for. A service restructure has created capacity to focus on key areas of activity, such as increasing the number of Area Engineers from three to six and maximising developers' contributions. It works with partners to address issues around recruitment, retention, training and development over the medium to long-term, for example, secondments to vacant posts and highways and risk awareness training.
- 146 A staff survey gave overall positive feedback, particularly about job satisfaction, notwithstanding the changes which the Council has introduced in recent years. However, there is scope for improvement in relation to communications, valuing staff, identifying training needs, application of training and helping staff understand how their work contributes to the Council's corporate aims. Initiatives are underway to address these issues. Sickness absence is showing an improvement across the Council from 9.57 days per full time equivalent in 2002/03, to 9.13 days in 2003/04 and 8.87 days in 2004/05. However, in the Service this was 14.2 days in 2004/05 (4.9 days excluding long-term absences).
- 147 The Council's investment in the Service has increased to the equivalent of Government funding, when previously it had not been seen as high a priority. Whilst the Service has adequate financial capacity to address key priorities, such as increased investment to improve rights of way, this is not sufficient to address all areas of need such as the condition of parts of the highway network and road lighting.

- 148** The Service can demonstrate some consideration of equalities issues in its policies, but not specifically human rights issues. It does not monitor performance in relation to key equalities and other legislation or make itself accountable for progress on these issues. The Council's Race Equality Scheme contains a commitment to address race equality and enable access to services but does not articulate how transport could influence improved equality.
- 149** The Council and Service have a robust, modern approach to procurement that applies best practice to achieve improved value for money in priority areas. The Service does not base procurement decisions solely on lowest cost options but on achieving greatest benefits for users, by taking into account service delivery issues and opportunities for partnership working. It engages effectively in strategic partnering, with evidence of improvements in services and facilities.
- 150** Partners have a greater understanding of respective responsibilities and are working with the Service to address past weaknesses such as a lack of effective joint working, issues over quality of work, reliability of information and delays in requests for information. The Highways Partnership is committed to achieving excellence in the delivery of the highway service to maintain and improve the highway network in a safe condition with minimal disruption, to contribute the Council's objectives and meet customer needs. The new culture aspires to achieve customer satisfaction, an integrated quality service, best value and a long-term partnership.
- 151** The Council is developing a collaborative approach to procurement of goods and services with adjoining authorities. This is a key element in its drive to increase efficiency through reducing costs and achieving more outcomes for the same cost. A procurement specialist has been seconded to take this initiative forward.
- 152** The Service has revised its arrangements for working with partners to improve road safety. The Council and its partners in the Cumbria Road Safety Partnership, which includes other public services and the Highways Agency, have not, until recently, had a systematic approach to exchanging and analysing data. Historically the approach has not been co-ordinated to make the best use of combined resources. This is not yet being addressed to form a truly integrated and efficient approach to road safety in Cumbria by using intelligence from all partners, including, for example, the impact of winter gritting polices.
- 153** The Service has revised working arrangements where an existing partnership has ceased to be effective, such as the Lake District Transport Strategy Partnership. This is now integrated with the LTP process and is in line with the DfT's report on Integrated Transport in National Parks. The Cumbria Strategic Partnership is creating a transport and accessibility group.
- 154** The Service has a good track record of attracting external funding to deliver improvements. It received over £3 million in 2005/06 for public transport and strategic planning. This included the Rural Bus Grant and Bus Challenge. The award of the government grant (by the Department for Education and Science and Department for Transport totalling £97,000) accelerated the schools travel plans programme by 33 per cent.

## **36 Cumbria Environment - Transport | What are the prospects for improvement to the Service?**

It also enabled the transfer of capital programme funding to implement more of the outputs of travel plans already in place. The Council achieved Pathfinder status and funding for post-16 transport policy to address social inclusion. A database of complementary funding opportunities for transport schemes ensures that opportunities for funding are identified.

- 155** The Council and district councils have agreed that additional resources from the removal of council tax discounts on second homes should be used for highways through Local Area Committees. However, funding for some activities beyond 2006/07 is not secured. This means that, for example, a transport service may be enhanced in a locality (and long term expectations raised) but not sustained. Furthermore, LPSA funding for road safety education ends in March 2006 and no decision has yet been made on continuing these activities. The Service takes a cautious approach to securing developers' contributions for transport improvements.

### **Summary**

- 156** The Service has an overall track record of delivering improvements. It can evidence a record of effectively implementing change that has led to improvements in service delivery. It can show that it has delivered improvements in outcomes that would be experienced by users, including disadvantaged communities. The direction of key performance indicators over the last three years is overall positive, but the number of road accident related deaths in the county is not decreasing. The capacity and track record demonstrate improving value for money over time through efficiency savings.
- 157** The Service has strengthened its arrangements for managing performance and improvement planning. It has aims and priorities for the future that are challenging and robust. It has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve but this is not always supported by key measures of success. The Service is seeking to improve the right things that matter most to communities and is addressing service weaknesses. Aims and future plans are co-ordinated and deliverable. The Service does not have specific clear proposals for meeting efficiency targets and improving value for money beyond those generated by the Highways Partnership.
- 158** Arrangements and a culture are largely in place to support continuous improvement but the Service does not yet have an asset management plan for the transport network. Leadership of the Service is generally effective but there is no single portfolio holder to drive the transport agenda in an integrated manner. Performance management systems are in place to monitor progress, review impact and deliver improved value for money. However, the Service is not making the best use of opportunities to learn from other councils and complaints.
- 159** The Service has access to the appropriate, tools and finances to deliver improvement although there are issues around long-term funding for some activities. It can evidence effective financial and human resource planning. A robust, modern procurement strategy applies best practice to achieve improved value for money in priority areas, including working with partners. The Council has increased resources in the Service to support inward investment which has been attracted, but some activities are dependent on short-term funding.

- 160** We judge Cumbria County Council's Transport Service to have **promising prospects** for improvement.