

Service Inspection Report

August 2006



Cultural Services

Worcester City Council

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Service inspection

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission 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 (KLOEs) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at 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 Worcester City Council provides 'good' Cultural Services and has 'promising' prospects for improvement.
- 2 Cultural services are user focused and have been reviewed and changed in direct response to feedback from customers. Aims are based on a sound knowledge of the challenges and opportunities faced by the service, including the views of the local communities. Physical access to facilities is good and is supported by long opening hours at the leisure centres. Development of the Advance Card has encouraged more people on low incomes to access leisure facilities.
- 3 The Council provides and enables a wide range of cultural activities for local people to participate in. By working in partnership, the Council provides a good range of outreach programmes particularly for children and young people. Diversionary facilities and activities for young people, such as the Perdiswell Skate Park, are provided which are effective in improving the quality of life for local residents.
- 4 The value of tourism to the city is recognised by the Council. Tourism is the only aspect of Cultural Services which is an explicit priority for the Council, linking to the corporate priority of Urban Renaissance but it is underdeveloped. The Council knows that it needs to make significant improvements in its tourism performance and has agreed with partners to set up a Destination Management Organisation to undertake the management of tourism and marketing to visitors. This should be in place by October 2006.
- 5 The Council promotes and supports major events such as the Victorian Christmas Fayre and Worcester Festival which bring in significant numbers of visitors to the city and helps to stimulate the local economy. This has been supported by significant improvements to the local environment such as refurbishment of the main shopping areas.
- 6 The Council is contributing positively to improved quality of life for local people. Improvements include investment in the local parks, increased outreach sports provision, sports coaching in schools and targeted services provided at the community centres. These have helped to reduce antisocial behaviour and improve community cohesion.
- 7 Cultural services has a strong track record in delivering value for money and securing external funding. Over the past five years the budget has reduced by £1.2 million whilst the provision of services has increased. Expenditure on Cultural Services is low compared to other councils with either good or average satisfaction levels being achieved.
- 8 Budgeting within Cultural Services is sound. Cultural Services has achieved its budget reductions over the past five years. The Council has taken steps to improve performance management and to address capacity issues by working effectively with partners.

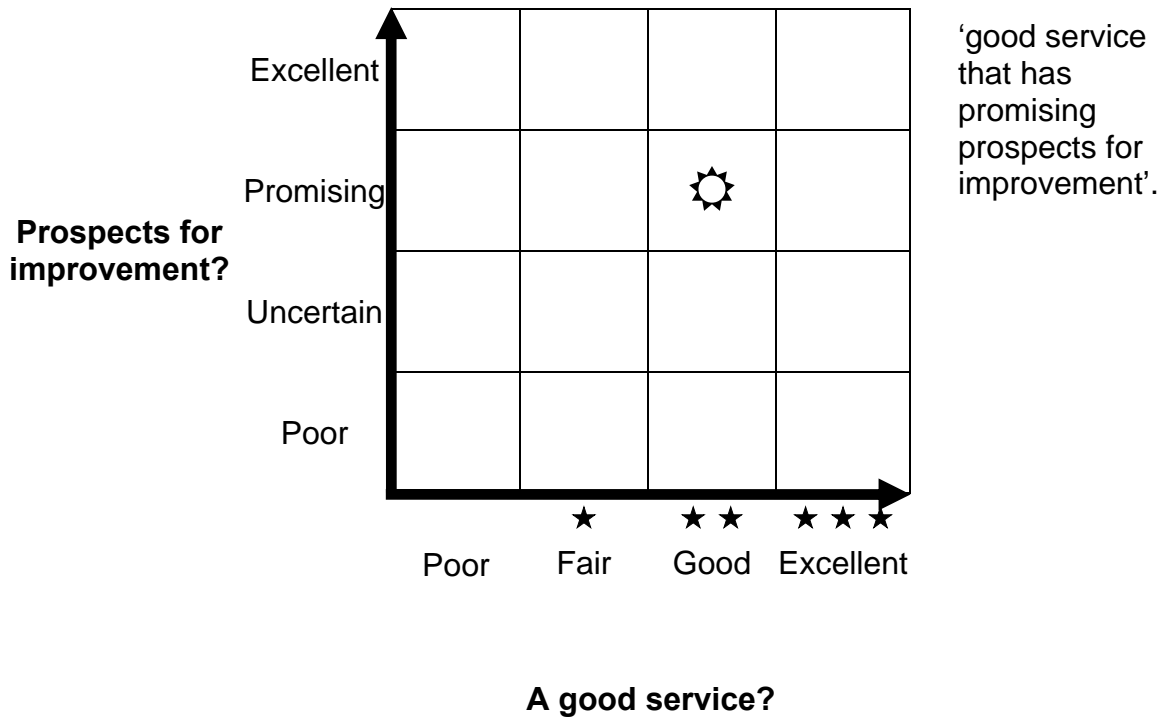
6 Cultural Services | Summary

- 9 The Council has a good record of improving Cultural Services using partnership working and external funding to deliver a wide range of improvements. Many of these improvements have been targeted to the most disadvantaged members of the city. These services are provided by enthusiastic and committed staff.
- 10 Project outcomes are not analysed for all aspects of Cultural Services. As a result the Council is unable to celebrate fully its successful outcomes or to use the information to shape future service delivery.
- 11 The Council's main website is basic. Content is difficult to update and there is an inadequate search engine. There are separate websites for tourism and museums. The sub-websites are more effective than the main site but it is not clear to users that they relate to Worcester City Council.
- 12 Service standards are not published for all aspects of Cultural Services. As a result users are not given a clear understanding on what level of service they can expect to receive.
- 13 The Council is not making best use of learning from elsewhere, such as the results of benchmarking, or information and communications technology to widen access to services.

Scoring the service

- 14 We have assessed Worcester City Council as providing a ‘good’ two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

¹ 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.

15 The service is a good, two-star service because:

- Worcester City Council's Cultural Services are user focused and have been reviewed and changed in direct response to feedback from customers. Aims are based on a sound knowledge of the challenges and opportunities faced by the service, including the views of the local communities;
- the Council provides and enables a wide range of cultural activities for local people to participate in. By working in partnership, the Council provides a good range of outreach programmes particularly for children and young people. Diversionary facilities and activities for young people, such as the Perdiswell Skate Park, are provided which are effective in improving the quality of life for local residents by reducing antisocial behaviour;
- the Council's leisure centres are well maintained, offer good opening times and have received high external validation scores. Development of the Advance Card has encouraged more people on people on low incomes to access leisure facilities;
- the Council has a track record of organising and enabling major events in the city. Events such as the Worcester Festival and the Victorian Christmas Fayre bring in significant numbers of visitors to the city and help to stimulate the local economy;
- the Council is contributing positively to improved quality of life for local people. Improvements include investment in the local parks, increased outreach sports provision, sports coaching in schools and targeted services provided at the community centres. These have helped to reduce anti-social behaviour and improve community cohesion; and
- the Council can demonstrate value for money for its Cultural Services. Expenditure on Cultural Services is low compared to other councils with either good or average satisfaction levels being achieved.

However:

- project outcomes are not analysed for all aspects of Cultural Services. As a result the Council is unable to fully celebrate successful outcomes or use the information to shape future service delivery;
- the Council is not making best use of its website to promote Cultural Services. The main website is weak on relevant content, not always current and has an inadequate search engine. The sub websites are better but they are not accessible to all members of the community or potential visitors; and
- service standards are not published for all aspects of Cultural Services. As a result users are not given a clear understanding on what level of service they can expect to receive.

16 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- the Council has a good record of improving Cultural Services using partnership working and external funding to deliver a wide range of improvements. Many of these improvements have been targeted to the most disadvantaged members of the city;
- the Council has plans in place to improve its tourism offering. It has agreed with partners to set up a Destination Management Organisation to undertake the management of tourism and marketing to visitors;
- Cultural Services have a strong track record in delivering value for money and securing external funding. Over the past five years the budget has reduced by £1.2 million whilst the provision of services has increased;
- leadership is strong with effective operational leadership from the Head of Service and there is clear political accountability. Staff at all levels across the service are enthusiastic and committed to the communities they serve; and
- budgeting within Cultural Services is sound. Cultural Services has achieved its budget reductions over the past five years. The Council has taken steps to improve performance management and to address capacity issues by working effectively with partners.

However:

- service planning is mixed and target setting is not always robust; and
- the Council is not making best use of learning from elsewhere, such as the results of benchmarking, or information and communications technology to widen access to services.

Recommendations

- 17 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 costs² 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 The Council should revise its performance management arrangements for Cultural Services to:

- *include a formal system for analysing service and project outcomes; and*
- *measure actual against target outcomes*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are that:

- *successful outcomes can be used to promote the Council to both users and non users; and*
- *information can be used to shape future service planning.*

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

R2 As part of already planned overall review of communications the Council should consider the following aspects:

- *have a quarterly communications planning meeting with the corporate communications team, to identify the major communications priorities arising from their service plans;*
- *develop procedures to ensure that service managers incorporate communications at an earlier stage in delivery of projects and are clearer about the expected outcomes of their communications activity; and.*
- *establish a consistent look and feel for marketing and communications material, particularly in the website, to ensure that users are clear who is delivering the service.*

² Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 percent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- *a more co-ordinated approach to communications planning;*
- *improved communications capacity;*
- *users will be clearer who is delivering the service and the standards that can be expected; and*
- *development of the corporate brand across all aspects of the Council's web presence.*

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

R3 The Council should agree and publicise service standards for all Cultural Services, which:

- *are developed and shared with stakeholders;*
- *are accessible so that service users, visitors and local residents can understand the level of service they can expect to receive; and*
- *are linked to community services objectives.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- *Cultural Services will be more accountable to service users and residents; and*
- *service users will have more information on which to judge the quality of services received.*

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

Report

Context

The locality

- 18 Worcester City is an urban district in the county of Worcestershire covering 3,327 hectares. Surrounding towns in the county include Kidderminster, Droitwich, Bromsgrove, Redditch, Pershore, Evesham and Great Malvern. Worcester City's main areas include Claines, Warndon, St John's and Dines Green. A recent study by the University of Strathclyde compared a range of British towns and cities as places to live, on a quality of life index, and ranked Worcester 11th out of 189 places.³
- 19 Worcester City experiences relatively low levels of deprivation compared with all local authorities. It is ranked 165 out of 354, based on the average deprivation scores of its constituent Lower Layer Super Output Areas. At Super Output Area level (below ward level), most areas fall within the 75 to 100 per cent least deprived. Two areas, Gorse Hill and Warndon, are in the 10 per cent most deprived in the country. Only 27 out of 61 Super Output Areas are in the 50 per cent most deprived in the country. According to the 2001 Census, 94.2 per cent of the population in Worcester City is 'White British.' The largest other ethnic group in the district is 'White: Other White.'
- 20 According to the 2004 Office of National Statistics figures, the population of Worcester City mid-2003 was 93,500. Most of the residents are aged between 16 and 44. The area also has above national average numbers of children between 0 and 14 years.
- 21 GCSE results are lower than that of the region and the country as a whole. 80 per cent of schools in the area achieved 5+ GCSEs grades A* to C, compared with a regional result of 92 per cent and nationally of 89 per cent. Other education indicators, including key stage 2 and 3 English and Maths, are generally above regional averages but below national averages.
- 22 Health indicators show an overall good standard of health in the area. 69.9 per cent of people described their general health as 'good' in the 2001 census and 15.9 per cent of residents have a limiting long-term illness, compared with 18.2 per cent for England and Wales. Teenage pregnancy rates however are higher than the national average, standing at 48.5 per cent for 2001/03. Health indicators show a higher than average cancer mortality rate, which has risen since the 2000-2002 result. Female life expectancy at birth has decreased overall since 1999 whereas male life expectancy at birth has increased.

³ As discussed on <http://www.cityofworchester.gov.uk/index.php?id=516>

- 23 The overall employment rate in Worcester City has decreased from 83 per cent 2002/03 to 78 per cent 2004/05, compared with national rates that have remained steady, albeit lower, at 75 per cent over the three-year period. Average earnings in Worcester City are below average for the country; gross weekly pay for all employees was £411 in 2004, compared to the median of £412 for the county and £426 for England. With a workforce of some 52,000, the employment structure of the city has changed, reflecting the national picture. Manufacturing jobs accounted for 18.5 per cent of employment in 1996 compared with 14.6 per cent in 2001. Worcester has a growing reputation for service and high tech based industries with the various service sectors being 78 per cent of the jobs.
- 24 Local attractions include Worcester Cathedral, Royal Worcester, Worcester Racecourse, The Guildhall and the Elgar Birthplace Museum in nearby Lower Broadheath. Lying on the banks of the River Severn, Worcester also prides itself on its surrounding rural landscape, popular for countryside and riverside walks and is home to National Trust properties throughout the county. West Midlands Safari Park is also nearby.
- 25 There are two parks in the county that have Green Flag Status - Waseley Hills Country Park and Worcester Woods Country Park. For the last three years, Worcester City Council's Parks Department has entered the 'Britain in Bloom' competition. So far they have collected two bronze awards and one silver gilt award.
- 26 In 2004 Worcester was designated by the government as one of three Sustainable Travel Demonstration Towns. £3.5 million was made available over five years to reduce traffic congestion by encouraging a 'modal' shift towards walking, cycling and public transport use.

The Council

- 27 Worcester City Council has been Conservative led since 2000. There are 18 Conservative councillors, 11 Labour, 3 Liberal Democrats and 3 Independents. The Council has a cabinet of six councillors, including the leader and deputy leader, and three select committees: Scrutiny Committee; Policy Development Committee; and Audit Committee. In addition to these committees the Council has regulatory committees for planning and licensing as well as a Standards Committee which monitors the ethical framework within which councillors must operate. There are also committees to consult with the trade unions representing council employees on personnel, human resource issues and safety issues.
- 28 The management structure of the Council consists of the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and seven heads of service.
- 29 The Council has a net revenue budget of £12.23 million for 2006/07. The current capital programme amounts to £7.1 million. It employs 527 full time equivalent members of staff. It was graded as a 'fair' council in its 2004 corporate performance assessment. It is a partner in both the city and county local strategic partnerships.

The Council's Cultural Services

- 30** The Council's Cultural Services consist of the following.
- Museums and Art Gallery – The city operates two sites: the Commandery and the City Art Gallery and Museum.
 - Parks and Open Spaces – The Council maintains and manages 74 acres of parks, 150 acres of open spaces and 600 acres of grassland/woodland.
 - Sports Centres – Leisure Connection run two of the sports centres on behalf of the Council: Worcester Swimming Pool on Sansome Walk and the Perdiswell Leisure Centre. The Council directly operates the two joint use facilities at Nunnery Wood and St Johns, along with the sports development function.
 - Tourism – The Council operates the tourist information centre from the Guildhall, organises the Worcester Victorian Christmas Fayre and provides a tourism and marketing function.
 - Community Development – The Council supports nine community centres, four of which are managed through the three community companies. It also provides and enables a range of community based work in disadvantaged areas.
 - Arts Development – The Council provides grant aid to arts venues and festivals in Worcester, and is a member of the county sub regional arts partnership.
- 31** Cultural Services are delivered by the Council's Community Services, which are also responsible for cemeteries, crematorium and archaeology services. The revenue budget for Community Services in 2006/07 is £5.43 million.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

32 The ambitions for Worcester are expressed in its community strategy which has a vision of 'Making Worcester a great place to live, work and visit'. The strategy which was reviewed in 2005 identifies its priority areas as:

- a cleaner and greener city;
- safer and stronger communities;
- urban renaissance; and
- customer care and citizen engagement.

Each of the priority areas is supported by a series of actions which have been developed following consultation with residents and stakeholders.

33 The county-wide cultural strategy has recently been revised. The Worcestershire Local Area Agreement 2006-2009 has introduced a 'Cultural Theme Group' to manage performance against the 'Stronger Communities' thematic block. For culture in Worcester there are strong links to 'Improving health and well being', 'Stronger communities' and 'Meeting the needs of children and young people' plus links to 'Economic success that is shared by all' theme groups. The theme groups align with Worcestershire's Community Strategy.

34 The Worcester Visitor Economy Strategy aims to make Worcester a 'Top Rank Cathedral and University City' by integrating parts of the city that are disconnected, especially the cathedral and the riverfront. The target groups are day visitors who live within 90 minutes drive of the city and staying visitors who live within 4 hours drive and are either young professionals without families or those in the 55-65 age group. The strategy identifies five priorities for tourism development:

- development of the riverside and canal basin, to include increased integration into the City Centre;
- night time and seven day economies;
- arts, culture, heritage and events;
- infrastructure, to include car/coach parking, hotel provision, signage and public space presentation; and
- marketing and branding.

35 The Visitor Economy Strategy is consistent with the City of Worcester Local Plan and the Regional Planning Guidance PG11 which identifies Worcester as a strategic town centre in the region for retail and leisure development.

- 36 The 2006/7 Community Service Vision statement states that the service '....aims to provide its services in the most cost effective and appropriate way, ensuring their relevance to the communities in which they are based, their continual improvement and the real involvement of their users. Community Services shares and works towards the aims of the Worcester Alliance community strategy and the City Council five priorities for service.'
- 37 The Worcester Play Strategy 2005-2010 has clear links to Worcester's Local Plan, Cultural Strategy and the Crime, Disorder and Community Safety Strategy. The strategy has been developed following extensive consultation with children, parents and other stakeholders. It identifies play areas to meet the 'Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play' requirements. A child friendly version of the strategy has been produced.
- 38 The main priorities for Community Services in 2006/07 are:
- implementing the three-year programme for King George V playing fields;
 - implementing the Visitor Economy Strategy and setting up the Destination Management Organisation; and
 - completing the refurbishments at the Commandery museum.

Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

Access, customer care and community focus

- 39 The provision of Cultural Services in Worcester is based on a good understanding and knowledge of local needs from surveys and other consultation. Knowledge of the needs of younger people is particularly strong and has been used to develop diversionary activities and targeted health promotion. For example a 2002 LPSA three year stretch target required the Council to increase sports provision to 65 per cent of its disadvantaged 7 to 11 year olds by two hours per week. The Council actually achieved 97 per cent over the three-year period.
- 40 Cultural services are user focused and the Council can show how services have been reviewed and changed in direct response to feedback from customers. The Council has a range of consultation mechanisms to identify local needs such as street surveys, user groups and the citizen's panel. However, the Council has limited arrangements in place for consulting and engaging with people who do not currently use Cultural Services. Some information on awareness and usage of Cultural Services was obtained in the residents' survey used to develop the Visitor Economy Strategy.
- 41 Physical access to facilities is good. All council buildings, apart from the Commandery, are Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. The Commandery is currently closed to the public for refurbishment. The aim is for it to be DDA compliant when it reopens early in 2007.

- 42 Opening hours at the leisure centres are good. Standard opening hours are 7.00am to 11.00pm during the week and 8.00am to 10.00pm at weekends. However, since April 2006 the two sites run by Leisure Connections have been opening at 6.30am following consultation with users. The four sites are popular with local people and usage has increased by 100,000 visits over the past two years.
- 43 The Council has made progress in improving access to some of its Cultural Services for people on low incomes. In 2004, following negative customer comments, the Leisure Card was replaced with the Advance Card which applies discounts at either 25 or 50 per cent for activities at the four leisure centres. Discounts depend on age or income circumstances but the discounts given are not obvious from the look of the card. The cards are also used for booking leisure activities. With the stigma removed from the use of the card, membership has risen from 380 to 4,900. However, this pricing policy has not been applied to all cultural activities.
- 44 Cultural Services has a good track record of encouraging and responding to customer feedback. For example, additional parking places and revised road layouts have been introduced at two of the leisure centres following customer complaints about traffic congestion. Park wardens have been reinstated following residents' concerns about security in the local parks. The Perdiswell Soccer Skills Centre has been created following consultation which showed that good quality training facilities, particularly for female football players, in the city was inadequate. Complaints and comments can be made via the website, email, by telephone or in writing.
- 45 The Council is taking positive steps to safeguard children and young people through its child protection policy. Criminal records bureau checks are carried out across all services for staff that may come into contact with children. Its policy requires contractors to carry out similar checks. However, notices prohibiting cameras and camera phones were not on display in the leisure centres or community centres when we visited.
- 46 The Council's approach to promoting and marketing Cultural Services is mixed. There are good examples of community newspapers promoting social inclusion. In addition, media partners consider they are kept well informed about cultural events. However, the Council does not have a corporate brand to promote its services; there are few communications guidelines in place for managers; and managers do not build communications and marketing into service planning. The result is that the impact of communications is reduced.
- 47 Accessible service standards have not been published for the full range of Cultural Services. Service standards for the leisure centres are clear and comprehensive, including aims, staff and customer care standards and how customers can comment or complain and the standards for response to those. Customers have been involved in the setting of the standards. However, they do not appear to be publicised outside the sports centres and are only available in English. As a result not all users will be clear about what levels of service to expect.

- 48 The Council is not making best use of modern communication methods. The Council website is basic, with inadequate search facilities and rigid content management procedures making it difficult for the site to be maintained and developed. Content on the website is sketchy in places and navigation is not always easy. As a result, 'sub-websites' for tourism, marketing, and museums have not been brought back into the corporate site but are being maintained separately. These sites are of a good quality, and are well populated and thought-through for website visitors. Usage figures for the sub-websites are assessed. However, without effective design guidelines, the different teams have been able to develop their own 'look and feel' which makes it almost impossible to tell that these services are delivered by the City Council. In addition, the web sites are not easily accessible to all members of the community or potential visitors. They do not comply with any recognised accessibility standards and are only available in English. While there is a link to a free translation facility this is hard to find and does not work effectively. Parts of the community may therefore find it more difficult to access information about Cultural Services that are available to them and an opportunity to market Worcester City to non-English speaking tourists is being lost.

Diversity

- 49 The Council's overall approach to diversity is developing. At corporate level the Council has an updated Comprehensive Equalities Policy. The Council has achieved Level 1 of the Equality Standard. It plans to reach Level 2 by March 2007 and Level 3 by March 2008. The Council is above average in promoting race equality (BVPI 2b) and one of the top performers in the country at responding to racial incidents (BVPI 175). Cultural Services have effectively engaged with community elders to identify gaps in service provision. This has led to the introduction of day time English lessons for Asian women in one of the Community Centres.
- 50 Cultural Services have taken positive steps to ensure that services are provided equitably. This has included work to consider the needs of specific groups such as children and young people, older people, people with disabilities and people from minority ethnic groups. Some monitoring takes place, primarily at the leisure centres where data is compared both to similar centres and to the local population. Recent survey work within the sports centres has indicated that 5 per cent of users are from black and ethnic minority (BME) groups against a city wide population representation of 4.2 per cent.
- 51 The Council has improved access to facilities for people with disabilities. The DDA working group, made up of partner organisations across the city, commissioned access audits for all Council properties as part of the DDA compliance work. As well as overseeing physical alterations to buildings, the group identified improvements to sensory and intellectual accessibility to services provided. Examples include producing audio guides for exhibitions in the Art Gallery and producing a guide to the museum service designed by people with learning difficulties.

- 52 Disabled sports provision is good. The Whole Sports Plan provides for 350 hours coaching at the city's four special educational needs schools. The partnership organisation Disability Sports Worcester provide weekly multi-sports sessions for people of all ages with the aim of encouraging more people to participate in sport. More disabled people are becoming involved with some moving on to participate at club level.

Service outcomes for users and the community

- 53 It is clear what the Council is aiming to achieve from its Cultural Services. It clearly understands the contribution that culture can make to other agendas and has positioned its Cultural Services to deliver towards its four strategic priorities. However, whilst there are clear links between the various strategies and plans, there are few measurable targets in place to demonstrate outcomes.
- 54 The Council provides and enables a wide range of cultural activities for local people to participate in. Investment in facilities has either been made directly by the Council or by partner organisations. By working in partnership, the Council provides a good range of outreach programmes particularly for children and young people. It supports local organisations through its own grant funding, helps partners to obtain external funding and uses its planning powers to secure section 106 monies from developers for cultural schemes, such as for improvements for local parks and play areas.
- 55 Cultural services are delivered by highly motivated and enthusiastic staff. Staff have good working relationships with user groups and volunteers. There is a track record of service users becoming volunteers and some then becoming paid employees of either the Council or one of its partners.
- 56 All four leisure centres are Quest accredited. This is the industry standard for sports facilities. On its most recent assessment, Nunnery Wood achieved the highest marks in the country for a dual use facility. Since April 2005 the Council has used the Sport England National Benchmarking Service to monitor performance in its leisure centres. However, at the time of our Inspection the results for 2005/06 had not been made available
- 57 Cultural services have been working closely with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to improve the health of local people. The PCT has acknowledged that increased activity in sport has helped to reduce the death rate from coronary heart disease and stroke related diseases in people aged under 75 in Worcester year-on-year since 1996. The city is on course to meet its 2010 'Healthier Nation targets for reducing death rates by two fifths for these groups. However over the same period overweight and obesity levels in five year olds have risen from 12.2 per cent to 14 per cent.

- 58 The Council is working with partners to improve sports provision for young people. The Worcester All Sports Provision (WASP) is a partnership between the six Worcestershire districts, University College Worcester, Worcestershire Council LEA and Sport England. WASP has delivered a Sport England Programme called Active Sports. Worcester City Council holds the budget for the partnership. Coaching in thirteen different sports is provided to all secondary schools. The programme has developed over the past three years in both the range of sports offered and the numbers of young people taking part. Impact information has recently started to be collected covering an individual's balance, agility and coordination before and after the programme.
- 59 The Council has worked in partnership with the Children's Fund to promote sport to children and young people in three priority wards in the city. Clubs have been established for before and after school and during the school holidays. After courses have finished young people are encouraged to join established clubs. Following the most recent netball course, four girls have joined Worcester City Netball Club. School teachers report improved behaviour of pupils following attendance at the courses. However, this feedback has been anecdotal rather than formalised.
- 60 The Council has not formally analysed service outcomes for all aspects of Cultural Services. Information is collected but falls outside the normal performance management arrangements. As a result it is unable to demonstrate the success or otherwise of the projects or schemes undertaken. It is also a missed opportunity for future service planning.
- 61 The Council agreed two areas of focus with inspectors: economic vitality and quality of life for local people.

Economic vitality

- 62 Cultural services understand the value of their contribution to economic objectives. The county wide Economic Impact of Tourism Worcestershire 2002-2004 showed an increase in visitor numbers, the value of tourism expenditure and jobs directly supported by tourism over the two-year period. In 2004 estimated tourism expenditure amounted to £63 million and supported 2,143 jobs in the city. The Heart of England Tourist Board estimates that Worcester attracts 2.4 million visitors per year.
- 63 The Council has demonstrated its ability to organise and stage major events well. The annual Victorian Christmas Fayre attracts over 100,000 visitors over the four days it is held each year. The Council has carried out a comprehensive review of this event and has made changes based upon the results of consultation undertaken. The event is recognised by the Heart of England Tourist Board as the biggest of its kind in the Midlands.

- 64 The Council has successfully used events to stimulate the local economy. The 2005 summer festival led to a 17 per cent increase in footfall in the Crowngate shopping centre over 2004. The Millennium Arts festival demonstrated the need for a major summer music event and this has grown to an annual performance at the Worcester County Cricket Ground for which 17,000 tickets were sold this year. The 'Race for Life' event has grown to the largest of its kind in the West Midlands. The 2005 race, which attracted over 10,000 spectators, was re-routed through the city to develop Sunday trading.
- 65 The Council has good information concerning both visitors and residents opinion of the cultural offer. The Council commissioned a survey of visitors to the city during June to September 2004. Overall, 58 per cent of visitors rated their visit as high or very high. Concern was expressed about the condition of public toilets, cleanliness and maintenance of the streets, road and pedestrian signage and the range of attractions. Visitors were more positive about the quality of accommodation, attractions, shopping and places to eat and drink. A survey of local residents was carried out at the same time and their assessment was similar to that of visitors to the city. Most residents considered that tourism brings benefits to the city. Information from both surveys has been fed into the Visitor Economy Strategy and Litter Campaign Strategy. The campaign has a target of Worcester being Britain's cleanest city by 2011 and the strategy has been developed by the City Council in partnership with the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust and has the support of the County Council, West Mercia Police and a range of voluntary and community groups. In addition, the Council has responded positively to concerns raised in the surveys including investing £140,000 to refurbish public toilets and introducing litter hit squads.
- 66 Over the past five years the Council has facilitated significant improvements to the urban environment. These include the Quayhead fountain and riverside public space; redesign and refurbishment of the High Street and Fish Street; extension of Gheluvelt Park to the riverside and development of the Pump House visitors centre; extension of Cripplegate Park to the riverside and the development of North Quay with improved mooring for twenty boats.
- 67 The Council provides reasonable support to creative industries. Financial support in 2005/06 amounted to £360,000 which was higher than the all England average spend for district councils. The Council supports the Three Choirs Festival, the Swan Theatre, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester Arts Workshop and the summer Worcester Festival. However, little has been done to develop other local creative industries such as providing business support and advice to individual artists, tailored support to new industries such as digital media and working with the film and television industry to promote the City as a location.

- 68 The Council has recognised that tourism is underdeveloped in the city and is not making a significant contribution to the corporate priority of Urban Renaissance. The visitor experience is not co-ordinated with Community Services, City Centre Management and private sector organisations all having an input. The Council has identified that management changes are needed if tourism is to develop further. However some improvements have been made. It identified that the amount and quality of hotel provision in the city is restricting the development of tourism. The Council commissioned a detailed study into this area in 2002. The study identified there was potential for an additional 200 rooms in the city. So far an additional 30 rooms have been provided and future development sites have been identified in the Local Plan.

Quality of life for local people

- 69 The Council is making progress in helping to improve the quality of life of local people. The King George V Park is situated in one of the most deprived areas in the city and was previously considered to be a virtual 'no-go' area for local residents. Following a Planning for Real exercise, the Council has invested in the park, improving access, security and facilities and has enabled a programme of community events. The park is now a well used resource for local residents who have taken back ownership of the park.
- 70 The learning from King George V Park has been applied to other parks in the city. In addition to investing and attracting grant funding the Council has encouraged residents and users to establish management boards and friends groups. The Friends of Gheluvelt Park now organise and publicise their own events and monitor maintenance standards. Friends groups are now well established for all the parks in the city.
- 71 By working in partnership with other organisations the Council has successfully implemented several diversionary schemes to help combat antisocial behaviour amongst young people. Through involving young people in designing, building and decorating the youth shelter in Warndon, antisocial behaviour has been significantly reduced and the area has been removed from the Police tasking strategy since April 2005. The Warndon shelter has been recognised by the Midlands Architecture and Designed Environment body as a good practice project. The model used in Warndon has been used for other youth shelters in the city.
- 72 The Council has shown a commitment to developing and improving children's play areas in the city. The work is coordinated by the Play Strategy Implementation Group which is made up from various partner organisations. Since 2000, 15 of the 55 city play areas have been redeveloped. The annual budget of £100,000 has been supported by £200,000 Big Lottery Funding in 2006/07 to bring additional play areas to the neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP) standard.

- 73 Until April 2006 the Council has used Sure Start to help improve the quality of life of children and their families in six of the most deprived wards in the city. Services were developed following extensive consultation with residents in these wards. Services have been targeted to help develop play learning and childcare in children under four years of age and support for teenage parents. From 1 April 2006 the Council passed over the management of the Sure Start Programme to the County Council.
- 74 The Council is using sport to improve the confidence of children. Multi-skills sports sessions have been introduced for year 1 children at each of the 35 primary schools in the city. The coach makes an assessment of each child's co-ordination, balance and agility before the start of the six weeks course and then again at the end. The course covers all the fundamentals of sport. The courses give school teachers ideas for future PE lessons and promote other sports to the children. However, although records are being maintained, they have not been analysed.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 75 Worcester City Council can demonstrate value for money for its Cultural Services. On one level this can be shown by comparing the amount it invests in services with residents' satisfaction levels. Financial data from CIPFA (2004/05 estimates) shows that, when compared with nearest neighbours, Worcester City has a low expenditure on sport and recreation per head, parks and open spaces per head, and culture and heritage per head. Overall Worcester City has the lowest expenditure on culture per head compared with nearest neighbours. In its tri-annual survey in 2003/04, both residents' satisfaction and residents' usage of museums were amongst the highest in the country. Satisfaction levels with sports and leisure facilities and with arts activities and venues were above average. Satisfaction with parks and open spaces was just below average. However, the Council has both invested in and attracted external funding for its parks over the past three years. Both the Citizens Panel and Liveability survey in 2005 showed increased residents' satisfaction with parks and open spaces.
- 76 Community Services manages its budgets effectively. This includes detailed monthly reports of each of the key cost centres within Community Services. The services have a track record of delivering to reducing revenue budgets. This can be demonstrated by the fact that despite the overall annual budget for Cultural Services being £1.2 million less than five years ago the provision of services has increased.
- 77 The Council is aware of its capacity limitations and has moved to be an enabler of some services rather than a direct provider. Examples include the racecourse, the Swan Theatre, Perdiswell Skate Park, Cripplegate bowling green and the four community centres. The result is that these services are available to the local community at less cost than would otherwise be the case and in some cases are of a higher quality than before.

24 Cultural Services | How good is the service?

- 78 The Council has a procurement strategy that reflects good practice. It has a clear objective of procuring services that are affordable, fit for the purpose, meet the needs of local people and service users and provide best value while taking into account important issues such as equalities, diversity and sustainability. It takes a long term strategic view of the procurement of its requirements including the potential for innovative funding, the management and balance of risk and the opportunity for cross service/agency and partnership working.
- 79 Community Services have taken the lead in changes to the Council's procurement practices. This has included being the first service to use totally electronic purchase order processing and to introduce procurement cards for purchasing of equipment. The Procurement Manager attends Community Services Management Team meetings and procurement is a standing item on the agenda.
- 80 Sport and recreation charges are regularly benchmarked against other Councils and private sector providers in the city. Charges were subject to a 'price is right' review in 2004. The most recent APSE comparisons for Nunnery Wood and St Johns sports centres are good. For example operational recovery levels of 95 per cent and 99.59 per cent were the second highest and highest of the family group; subsidy per head of £0.58 and £0.43 were the third lowest and second lowest of the family group; and customer spend per head of £3.05 and £3.69 were the second highest and highest of the family group.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 81 The Council has a good record of improving Cultural Services. Following the best value review for sport and recreation, a cross party working group was set up to oversee the procurement process for new operators for the Swimming Pool and Perdiswell Leisure Centre. External consultants were used to support the development of a 10 year public private partnership which accessed £2.5 million of private capital for improvement of facilities and reduced the revenue budget by £150,000 per annum. Like for like usage of the two facilities increased by 25 per cent between 2004/05 and 2005/06 and they achieved Quest accreditation for the first time. The Council has used partnership working effectively to deliver improvements that the community wants.
- 82 The Museum and Art Gallery service has demonstrated consistent improvement. *Fast Forward - Trends in museum performance in the West Midlands* produced by the MLA shows that, overall, the service has continued to improve. Actions have also been identified to continue the improvement across all categories. A programme of refurbishment work and development of services at the City Museum and Art Gallery was completed in 2003. The final phase was the creation of the Worcestershire Soldier gallery through its partnership management arrangement with two regimental museum trusts. This was funded by a Heritage Lottery fund grant of £450,000. In 2005/6 the Museum and Art gallery recorded 66,250 visitors, the highest for 10 years. However, reduced capacity within the service means that this improvement may not be sustained.
- 83 Tourism is not as well developed as would be expected given that it is a key priority. The Council has recognised that fundamental changes to the delivery of the service are required but progress has been slow although, in part, this has been due to the need to gain the agreement of a range of stakeholders.
- 84 Sport and recreation have been used to deliver significant improvement in the well being of the more disadvantaged members of the community. As part of the Worcestershire wide PSA, the Council targeted excluded school age children and exceeded its target of 61 per cent participating in two or more hours of physical activity, achieving over 97 per cent participation. The refurbishment of the sports facilities has seen an increase in users of approximately 100,000 per year and the review of the Leisure Card and subsequent launch of the Advance Card has seen usage by the disadvantaged and the young from 380 to 4,900 by the end of 2005/06.

- 85 The Council can demonstrate improvements in outcomes as a result of enabling service developments. The Safer Worcester Partnership's audit of crime, disorder and community safety in 2001 found that the nuisance caused by young people skateboarding was a significant concern to residents. The Council facilitated the development of the Perdiswell Skate Park by donating the land for the site, organising the consultation with young people, writing the business plan and enabling fund raising. The scheme is now managed by the Perdiswell Young People's Leisure Club and complaints to the Council have dried up.
- 86 Performance against key performance indicators (KPIs) is generally positive. Satisfaction with local museums has remained constant while satisfaction with parks and open spaces and sports and leisure facilities has increased. The number of visits to museums has increased consistently, although the number of personal and school group visits has decreased steadily, indicating increasing access via the web site, by telephone and by email. Of local performance indicators (PIs) relating to Cultural Services, 62 per cent have shown an improvement.
- 87 Worcester City's Cultural Services have a strong track record of delivering value for money. Against a background of improving user satisfaction and to achieve the mid term financial plan, there have been net reductions in the Community Services base revenue budget of £419,000 on 2003/04, £245,000 in 2004/05 and £243,000 in 2005/06. Savings have been augmented by increased income generation from sports centres, and by seeking alternative ways of providing services and external capital and revenue funding.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 88 The service has clear aims and priorities. A county wide cultural strategy involving the County Council and the six district councils has recently been revised. The strategy was developed following consultation with users and stakeholders and has been used by the Local Area Agreement (LAA) Cultural Theme group as the basis for identifying service delivery targets which are now embedded in the LAA programme. However, the Community Services Vision has only recently been agreed by the Key Priority Group and was not developed in consultation with stakeholders. As a result partners and staff are less clear about the overall vision for the service.
- 89 Councillors and managers have a clear understanding of what being a top rank cathedral and university city means for Worcester. However, this understanding is less clear amongst front line staff and partner organisations.
- 90 Leadership of Cultural Services is strong. There is effective operational leadership from the Head of Service and other senior managers. There is a cabinet member with responsibility for the service and a Key Priority Group, consisting of senior officers, the leader, deputy leader, portfolio holder and Chief Executive which monitors progress.

- 91 Tourism is the only aspect of Cultural Services which is an explicit key priority for the Council, linking to the corporate priority of Urban Renaissance. Benchmarking has been used effectively to underpin the development of the Visitor Economy Strategy which aims to make Worcester a top rank cathedral and university city. This information, and further survey work with visitors and residents, indicated that for Worcester to achieve significant improvements in its tourism performance there would be a need to make fundamental changes to the way that marketing and the management of visitors was undertaken. This led to the decision to set up a Destination Management Organisation (DMO). It is intended that this will connect the City Council departments that are responsible for managing different aspects of the visitor experience, with city centre management, tourism management, and with private and sector interests. This should enable them to work more closely together in developing and promoting Worcester as a destination. The DMO is to be created by October 2006 and will include a wide range of both public and private sector organisations. A majority of board members will be from the private sector.
- 92 Aims are based on a sound knowledge of the challenges and opportunities faced by the service, including the views of the local communities. The final draft of the PPG 17 Open Space Indoor Sports and Recreation Assessment has recently been completed following in depth community consultation with hard to reach groups. This will help to develop future policy, providing the evidence to safeguard and protect open space and define the policies for future provision based on evidence identified.
- 93 Planning in Community Services is mixed. Community Services produce a three-year service plan updated each year and in 2005/06 87 per cent of the Community Services service plan targets were achieved. Individual services produce annual plans but target setting is not always robust. Some individual services are starting to develop an outcome based approach, for example the King George V development plan sets out outcomes, including social ones that it is intended to achieve.
- 94 The Council has taken steps to improve performance management. The number of cabinet members has recently been increased by one to allow the Deputy Leader to focus on performance management across the Council. The Key Priority Group meets regularly to ensure that corporate and service plans remain on target and to authorise any changes required to improve performance. A performance management system, which includes all the KPIs from the Council's Corporate Plan and all national Best Value PIs, is now deployed on the network and provides easy access to performance information for senior and middle managers throughout the Council.

- 95 Risk management forms a key part of the Council's approach to performance management. The risks associated with cross cutting issues and individual service projects are identified and reviewed as part of the Council's corporate business planning process. They are monitored through regular reports to Key Priority Groups, the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and the Performance Management Panel. Individual risks applicable to each service project are reviewed on a six weekly basis as part of Community Services' ongoing performance monitoring.
- 96 The service has a good track record of financial management and does not overspend.
- 97 Community services are open to learning in the delivery of their services but this is not always systematic. Benchmarking has been undertaken in sports and recreation, tourism and the museum and art gallery. While sports and recreation has used competitor analysis in the setting of fees and charges at leisure centres and have exchanged good practice with other similar centres, there is no evidence that benchmarking in other parts of the service has been used to inform service development. The service has made good use of comments and complaints to inform service delivery but it is not clear how learning from individual services is shared across the Council.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 98 The Council has recognised key capacity issues both corporately and within Community Services and is taking steps to address them. Provision has been made in the budget for strengthening the middle management in the Council. It has identified that there is a risk that the service does not have the capacity to deliver the projects it has planned. In order to ameliorate this it put in place a three year review of Community Services reducing the number of items in both corporate and service plans so that it could focus on priority services.
- 99 Staff at all levels across the service are enthusiastic and committed to the communities they serve and there is a good working relationship between officers and members. There are a number of examples of volunteers from the local community becoming paid employees, for example the Assistant Park Warden at King George V Park. This helps to ensure that the workforce understands the needs of the communities it serves and has lead to improved engagement with hard to reach groups such as disaffected young people.
- 100 Community Services are developing the skills and capacity of their staff. A single management structure has been implemented across the two directly managed sports centres to reduce duplication of effort. A skills gap analysis was carried out and training put in place to ensure that all staff had the skills required for their new roles. The Council is also a centre for the Institute of Leadership and Management and offers the Introductory and Full Certificate award in First Line Management. The corporate assessment identified a need for improved project management skills across the Council. As a result the Council has put in place a programme of Prince2 training for managers. However, it is too early to tell whether this will have a positive impact on the delivery of projects.

- 101 Shortfalls in specific skills for projects are identified and then addressed through the use of external consultants. For example landscape architects were brought in to develop the scheme for the Riverside which was then used as the basis for the funding bid for Gheluvelt Park, consultants were used to develop the Visitor Economy Strategy, and specialist designers worked on designs for the museum developments. This increases the capacity of the service to deliver on key projects.
- 102 The Council makes the most of the opportunities offered through the bid development process. Although the bid to the Big Lottery Fund to develop the waterside failed, relationships with partners have improved as a result of the process and discussions are underway as to how a reduced scheme can be implemented.
- 103 The service works effectively with partners to increase capacity. Following the successful development of a friends group at Gheluvelt Park, there is now a friends group for each major park. The service has worked with the friends groups to encourage the local communities to use the parks, putting on a wide range of events such as After Dark in the Park, Raiders of the Lost Park and Carols in the Park. There is a close working relationship with the county archaeology service which provides cover to the city service when required. The county council provided development funding for the Worcester Waterfront lottery bid and the bid development process has led to a closer working relationship between the two councils. This allows the service to provide a better service than it would otherwise be able to do.
- 104 Partnership working to deliver the Visitor Economy Strategy is under development. The need to bring together the stakeholders that have responsibility for managing and promoting the city centre was identified as the key to developing tourism in the City. As a result, the stakeholders, including the Council have agreed to set up a destination management organisation to manage and promote the city in an integrated way and recruitment to key posts is underway. The aim of this organisation will be to connect the City Council departments that are responsible for managing different aspects of the visitor experience, with city centre management, tourism management, and private and sector interests. It will enable them to work more closely together in developing and promoting Worcester as a destination.
- 105 The Council now has a strategic approach to the development of its workforce. In April it agreed the Strategy for Improving and Developing Worcester City Council's Workforce 2006–2009 and associated action plan. The strategy was developed following consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and addresses a number of the issues highlighted by the 2005 staff survey. Achievement of the short, medium and long term actions will address current issues such as staff sickness absence.

- 106 The Council's strategic policies are clearly linked to the Medium Term Financial Plan. In particular financial prudence and value for money is based on limiting council tax rises to a maximum of 2.5 per cent per year over the next five years and delivering services through grant aid and external contracts or partnerships with others where those are the best option. To achieve this, efficiency savings, increased income and reductions in services amounting to over £2.3 million per annum must be achieved by 2009/10.
- 107 There is a robust procurement strategy which applies best practice, including working with partners. Community Services have taken the lead in implementing improved procurement practices within the Council and most of the savings achieved last year were in the service. Procurement is a regular item on the Community Services management team agenda when the corporate Procurement Officer attends to discuss procurement issues. The review of vehicle leasing arrangements within the Parks Service has resulted in an annual saving of £30,000. The Council has used strategic partnering to deliver improvements at the Perdiswell Sports Centre, Worcester Swimming Pool and race course and to enable the Swan Theatre to remain open.
- 108 The Council has a good track record of attracting external funding, where appropriate, to support local service priorities often using its own resources to lever in additional funding. Over the last five years £5.3 million capital and £3.5 million revenue of external funding has been accessed, for the benefit of Cultural Services. Capital schemes progressed through external funding have included the Quayhead fountain area, the new public 18 hole golf course, creation of a new military gallery at the City Museum and Art Gallery, complete refurbishment at the Commandery museum, refurbishment work at two city parks and the creation of the Perdiswell Soccer Skills Centre. The Council is also using section106 monies effectively to enable needs identified through the strategy development processes to be met. To date £750,000 has been used and a further £1 million allocated for future benefit of cultural schemes. This enables the Council to deliver benefits for the community that it would not be able to do from its own resources.

Appendix 1

- 1 The descriptors for judgement one scores have been agreed by the Local Services Inspectorate Forum (LSIF). Members are The Commission for Social Care Inspection, the Audit Commission, The Office for Standards in Education, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Fire Services Inspectorate, Department for Education and Skills and the Healthcare Commission.

Table 1 Judgement 1: How good is the service?

| Score | AC labels and stars | LSIF descriptors |
|-------|----------------------------|--|
| 4 | Excellent ⚙️⚙️⚙️ | A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users; is highly cost-effective and fully contributes to the achievement of wider outcomes for the community. |
| 3 | Good ⚙️⚙️ | A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users; is cost-effective and makes contributions to wider outcomes for the community. |
| 2 | Fair ⚙️ | A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users; and is not especially cost-effective, nor contributes significantly to wider outcomes for the community. |
| 1 | Poor (0 stars) | A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users; is not cost-effective and makes little or no contribution to wider outcomes for the community. |

Table 2 Judgement 2: Prospects for improvement

| Score | AC labels | Descriptors |
|-------|----------------------------|--|
| 4 | Excellent prospects | A service with improvement arrangements and capacity well above the minimum requirements needed to deliver continuous improvements in outcomes for users; and/or the wider community and in value for money. Few, if any barriers to improvement exist. |
| 3 | Promising prospects | A service with improvement arrangements and capacity consistently above the minimum requirements needed to deliver continuous improvements in outcomes for users; and/or the wider community and in value for money. Enablers of improvement strongly outweigh barriers to improvement. |
| 2 | Uncertain prospects | A service with improvement arrangements and capacity such that delivery of continuous improvements in outcomes for users; and/or the wider community and in value for money is uncertain . Enablers of, and barriers to, improvement are finely balanced. |
| 1 | Poor prospects | A service with improvement arrangements and capacity that do not meet the minimum requirements needed to deliver continuous improvements in outcomes for users; and/or the wider community and in value for money. Either barriers to improvement strongly outweigh enablers of improvement, or few, if any, enablers of improvement are in place. |