

Corporate Assessment Report

August 2006



Corporate Assessment

Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council

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Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under Section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement

Considered against the shared priorities of:

- sustainable communities and transport;
- safer and stronger communities;
- healthier communities;
- older people; and
- children and young people.

- 3 Corporate assessments are normally aligned with a joint area review of services for children and young people (JAR). In practice this means that the Council's achievements in relation to children and young people are assessed using the evidence provided from the JAR. In addition, examples of outcomes and activity, which are relevant to the other themes and which are identified through the JAR, are considered within the corporate assessment.

- 4 The JAR covers all services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes. The separate JAR report covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that such services work together to improve outcomes. The description and judgement in respect of children and young people in this report is summarised from the JAR report.

Executive summary

- 5 Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council is performing well. It has worked with its partners and the wider community to establish clear and challenging ambitions for the area. These ambitions have been based on widespread consultation and involvement, and hence relate well to local need. They are generally understood by partners and stakeholders, and link well with the community strategy. What is not so clear to those outside the Council is how the various strategies and plans link together to deliver the more detailed objectives arising from the ambitions.
- 6 The Council is providing strong community leadership to help deliver these ambitions and this is recognised and appreciated by its partners. Partnership working is a notable feature of how the Council is seeking to achieve its ambitions, and there is a range of initiatives with the private sector, health, and neighbouring councils which have increased the Council's own capacity to deliver. Political and managerial leadership is a strength, providing the necessary strategic direction to achieve its ambitions, and the Council's culture is changing to embrace different ways of working. It regularly reviews its priorities, although it is not always clearly stated what are not priorities, or what the expected impact is of moving resources between priorities.
- 7 Performance management is being further strengthened from a reasonable base, with a robust process now in place. The availability of information and intelligence, particularly at a very local level, is also developing through the construction of a Vitality Index which contains information on aspects of deprivation at a sub-borough level. The Council has yet to fully develop measures of its impacts across all services, although this is advanced in some areas, such as children and young people and aspects of safer and stronger communities. Partners are involved in performance management in a number of areas. The Council has a strong commitment to equality and diversity, with good links to its relatively small Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, including the large Jewish community. It is currently strengthening its processes for achieving value for money to ensure that existing good practice becomes more widespread across the Council.
- 8 A wide range of achievements is evident in the Council's priority areas, with recognisable improvements for local people. It is good at identifying linkages between these areas, and ensuring that its actions and those of its partners reinforce impact in as many areas as possible.
- 9 The Council has made progress in tackling the overall deprivation that is evident in the borough through its emphasis on regeneration. It has succeeded in creating a 'sense of place' and confidence, which is leading to more inward investment. It has secured large scale external funding to improve the housing stock of the area, and is progressing well on delivering its ambitions for clean and green liveability. Affordable housing provision and future waste management are examples of areas that still remain a challenge.

- 10 The Council has taken a leading role in relation to stronger and safer communities, and has seen significant reductions in crime over the last two years. It works well with partners, particularly with the police, and is now further addressing anti-social behaviour and alcohol-related issues.
- 11 The Council is working well to improve the health of the local community and has achieved good outcomes linked to its priorities. It is also tackling many of the determinants of health through its work in housing, regeneration, and education. Strong partnerships exist with the health sector. The Council has beacon status for health promotion, and has some good initiatives targeted at minority groups.
- 12 The Council and its partners take a strategic approach to meeting older people's needs which goes well beyond health and social care. There is a strong commitment to improving the independence of older people through innovative social care and housing provision.
- 13 The Council has strong partnership arrangements in providing for children and young people and these have been effective at improving services. There are ambitious plans and clear priorities for improving services.
- 14 The Council is open to new ways of doing things, and there have been some impressive achievements given its local context of deprivation. Yet there are still areas where further improvement is required. This includes further strengthening its prioritisation process; its performance, financial and risk management arrangements; consultation and community engagement; and developing more local ways of tackling inequalities and targeting impact.

Areas for improvement

- 15 The Council needs to ensure that its approach to regeneration is based upon a robust strategy that clearly addresses the needs of the local area and effectively measures the outcomes from its activity. This will include addressing some critical areas for the future, such as the provision of affordable housing, and dealing with increasing levels of waste.
- 16 The Council needs to improve the involvement of all diverse groups in both consultation over plans but also in setting service standards, and ensuring that feedback takes place consistently to those involved in consultation; and to continue to develop engagement and capacity building with all BME groups in order to enable them to play a greater role in working with the Council to achieve their aspirations. The Council has achieved very positive engagement with the Jewish community and needs to ensure this is developed with other diverse groups.
- 17 The Council needs to further develop its work on compiling a detailed local information database by further developing information sharing and research with its partners, in order to provide intelligence at a more local level and build up baseline information. This will allow the Council to better target initiatives and actions in order to reduce inequalities between areas.
- 18 The Council needs to clarify its service planning framework by using the proposed update of *Towards 2010* and the community strategy to:
 - simplify and clarify priorities and objectives and their links at different levels;
 - ensure the full integration of the local area agreement, community strategy, corporate plan and service plans;
 - establish clearer links between service and financial resourcing; and
 - improve the medium term financial strategy to provide guidance on how priorities can be addressed in the longer term.
- 19 The Council should further develop performance management by ensuring that targets are clearer and more challenging and focus on outcomes, with measures that clearly identify the desired impact in improving the quality of life for the people of Gateshead.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	2
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3
	Performance management	2
What has been achieved?	Achievement	3
Overall corporate assessment score**		3
*Key to scores		
1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance		
2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance		
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well		
4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly		

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

Scores on 5 themes	Overall corporate assessment score
Two or more themes with a score of 4 None less than score of 3	4
Three or more themes with a score of 3 or more None less than score of 2	3
Three or more themes with a score of 2 or more	2
Any other combination	1

Context

The locality

- 20** Gateshead is located within the conurbation of Tyne and Wear in the North East of England. It is the largest of the five metropolitan councils within the conurbation, covering an area of 14,360 hectares (55 square miles). It is a borough of contrasts; over half of Gateshead is rural, but there is also a large urban centre, and areas of industrial decline. It has a mixture of land uses, ranging from the quayside in central Gateshead and nearby high density development, through large post-war council estates to a predominantly rural area with many small isolated communities and pockets of deprivation. Gateshead is home to one of the largest industrial estates in Europe - the Team Valley Trading Estate - and also to one of the largest retail centres, the Metro Centre. The main population centres are Gateshead Town Centre, Felling, Dunston, Birtley and Blaydon.
- 21** In common with much of the North East, Gateshead has suffered from the decline of traditional industries, resulting in large areas of brownfield land. Nearly half the population live in the top 20 per cent most deprived areas in England, making Gateshead the 26th most deprived local authority area out of the 354 in the country. The population in 2004 was 191,300, which represents a modest growth after a 20-year decline. There is a growing proportion of older people in the 65-74+ age group (20.3 per cent of the population), with fewer under-30 year-olds and under-5s than the national average. The working population of 116,900 is just over 75 per cent economically active. However, it is a mostly low wage earning economy.
- 22** The number in receipt of Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance has reduced but is still high, and worklessness remains a key challenge, as does the health of the population. Over 60 per cent of the population fall within the 20 per cent most deprived in England in terms of health and disability. Over 30 per cent of households have an income under £10,000. Unemployment has fallen substantially from 16 per cent in 1987 to 2.9 per cent, although this remains higher than the national average of 2.4 per cent. Public administration, education, and health are the largest employment sectors. There are low levels of adult basic skills, with 22 per cent of adults having low literacy skills and 63 per cent low numeracy skills. Schools have shown very good attainment improvements over the last eight years, with 65 per cent of young people last year gaining at least five GCSEs graded A* to C, making Gateshead LEA eighth nationally.
- 23** There is a relatively small but growing BME population of 1.6 per cent, and a large orthodox Jewish community representing around 2.3 per cent of the population. There are approximately 1,000 asylum seekers and this number is growing.

- 24 There is a sustained focus on regeneration in the borough in response to industrial decline. The Council has invested in environmental and physical regeneration, including using cultural developments such as The Angel of the North, The Sage Gateshead and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, as well as the restoration of Saltwell Park and redevelopment of Gateshead International Stadium. In a joint bid with Newcastle, Gateshead was shortlisted for the European Capital of Culture 2008 and has now been acknowledged as a Centre for Culture Excellence by the judges.

The Council

- 25 There has been political continuity of the Council, with longstanding Labour control. Following the recent election Labour has 42 of the 66 seats; the Liberal Democrat opposition has 23 and the Liberals one. The Leader was elected in May 2002. Council business is managed via a Leader and cabinet system, supplemented by five overview and scrutiny committees, five advisory groups, and special panels. Each of the ten cabinet members has a specific thematic portfolio which matches the themes of the community strategy and corporate plan policy areas.

- 26 At officer level the Council is led by the Chief Executive, who has been in post for two years. There are four Group Directors each responsible for one of the following areas:

- Community Based Services;
- Development and Enterprise;
- Learning and Children; and
- Local Environmental Services.

There are also four Strategic Directors who are responsible for managing central services. The eight Group and Strategic Directors with the Chief Executive make up the senior management team of the Council.

- 27 Within each area there are a number of services, each run by a Head of Service who takes responsibility for the day to day running of the service and the management of employees. The Council employs around 11,000 staff, and the revenue budget for the current financial year is £255.6 million. Council Tax Band D is £1,224.05 for 2005-06. In January 2004 the Council transferred its former social housing to an arm's length management organisation (ALMO), The Gateshead Housing Company. Substantial resources are being invested to transform the housing market as part of the 'Bridging NewcastleGateshead' housing market renewal pathfinder.
- 28 The Council's vision for the area and that of the Gateshead Strategic Partnership (GSP) is 'Local people realising their full potential, enjoying the best quality of life in a healthy, equal, safe, prosperous and sustainable Gateshead'. The GSP was formed in 1999 and the first community strategy was published in 2001. Following widespread consultation in 2003 a revised strategy was produced, with a focus on shorter term actions for 2004 to 2007.

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The performance of the GSP was judged 'green' by Government Office for the North East in 2005. Gateshead was in the first wave of Local Area Agreements, which was agreed in March 2005 and reviewed in October 2005. A review of the community strategy to reshape it as a Sustainable Community Strategy is likely to occur during the coming year. The Council is reviewing its corporate plan *Towards 2010* to provide a longer-term focus.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

Ambition

- 29 The Council is performing well in this area.
- 30 Ambitions for the borough are clear in the community strategy and corporate plan, and the Council has established strong links with its partners to deliver these ambitions. Areas for improvement include addressing a lack of understanding in the community of how the various plans and strategies of the Council relate to each other, and ensuring engagement with all communities within the borough.
- 31 The community strategy sets out a clear direction of travel for Gateshead in the medium term. It has been drawn up by the Gateshead Strategic Partnership (GSP) following widespread consultation and based on local priorities. The GSP's vision for Gateshead is 'Local people realising their full potential, enjoying the best quality of life in a healthy, equal, safe, prosperous, and sustainable Gateshead.' This vision is shared by the Council and is the starting point for its corporate plan, *Towards 2010*. The Council sees economic and social regeneration as a driver for achieving the vision, with an emphasis on creating a clear 'sense of place' and confidence in Gateshead. The Council has six medium term objectives in the corporate plan, which set out how the Council will deliver the vision and ambitions by focusing on cross-cutting issues that need to be addressed in the short-term.
- 32 The Council has clear and challenging ambitions. They are contained within ten policy areas which are aligned with those of the community strategy. These policy areas are: children and young people; lifelong learning; employment and economy; culture; housing; health; social support; community safety; transport; and the environment.
- 33 The priorities are supported by the Council's Improvement Plan and service plans. The Improvement Plan sets out the details of the priorities for action for the year ahead, which flow through into the service plans, and area based plans. The latter are intended to co-ordinate the delivery of the Council's priorities at a neighbourhood level. There are also various cross-cutting strategic plans. It is a complex arrangement of plans. Although there is general agreement and support for what the Council is trying to do, the complexity of the various plans and strategies has resulted in partners and the public not always being clear about all the priorities of the Council and how they relate to each other.

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- 34** There are links between national shared priorities and local ones, such as the emphasis on reducing health inequalities and worklessness in order to tackle deprivation in the borough. These are brought together in a Local Area Agreement (LAA), which has been developed by the GSP. The LAA is based on the existing priorities developed by the GSP and its targets will reinforce their achievement.
- 35** The Council has good data on, and understanding of, the various communities within the borough. The Council collects and shares this data with partners. Examples include public health and police data. The Council is currently working on a Vitality Index which contains information on aspects of deprivation at a sub-borough level and GENIE (Gateshead Electronic Neighbourhood Information Engine) in order to aid locality working, and this is using data from a number of partners. Information on youth offending and data from the Social Services CareFirst system is used. This approach reduces duplication and makes more effective use of available information.
- 36** The Council uses a wide range of consultation mechanisms, and uses the information to help shape priorities and change them over time. Consultation includes the use of Viewpoint, a residents' panel formed in 1999, but the Council also uses a more focused approach in specific areas where there are perceived issues, as in Bensham with large Jewish and Muslim communities. It has developed consultation with specific minority groups through structures such as the Jewish Ladies' Community Event, and the BME Youth Forum. In order to encourage consultation and involvement the Council provides practical support such as travel expenses and taxis, and a carers' allowance for children.
- 37** The Council is seen as a good community leader by its partners, and it has strong partnerships across the range of statutory, community, voluntary and private stakeholders, including some of the smaller BME groups. The response to the stakeholder survey was extremely positive. It is able to work well with its partners towards the achievement of shared aims, and there is evidence of the GSP helping to monitor and set outcomes where external funding is involved, as with the LAA. This strength of partnership working is also leading to the development of partnerships not involving the Council directly but aimed at working towards the achievement of the overall ambitions for the borough as set out in the community strategy. This is apparent particularly within the health agenda, for example in the arrangements for implementing the Gateshead PCT Local Delivery Plan.
- 38** The Council is supportive towards its partnerships and is developing a more rigorous approach, particularly towards governance. The Council has increased the level of grants and awards to BME groups, and has a community liaison officer with a special remit to assist these groups, but some of the BME groups consider that the Council does not fully appreciate the difficulties they have in engaging with the Council and their own communities, partly because they were dependent upon volunteers and had minimal resources.

- 39 The Council has demonstrated the ability to make some hard decisions in order to balance competing demands and available resources. This included the setting up an ALMO to improve the condition of the housing stock, and moving resources from residential care homes to support greater independent living. This ability has enabled the Council to focus on its priorities whilst maintaining service quality in those areas where additional investment is not being made.

Prioritisation

- 40 The Council's performance is adequate in this area.
- 41 The Council's priorities reflect national priorities and local needs. There is strong political and managerial leadership which is driving delivery. The Council has engaged well with its diverse communities and is further developing this through neighbourhood management and its strong partnership working. However, the impact of moving resources to deliver priorities is not always clearly set out. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) does not yet provide long-term clear strategic financial leadership.
- 42 The Council has responded well to national priorities and has ensured that its own priorities reflect local needs, particularly in areas such as housing, safer and stronger communities, older people, and children and young people. The Council's priorities are clearly linked to community concerns as set out in the community strategy. They are based on widespread intelligence about Gateshead, developed with partners, including those of the various diverse communities, although not all groups have been involved, such as carers, lone parents and people with long-term sickness.
- 43 Priorities are developed from corporate plan outcome areas into detailed actions through the service and area action plans which cover a rolling three-year period. The Council has agreed a range of targets for each of its priorities and the actions aimed at achieving them for a five-year period, and these are divided into key and non-key performance indicators. This allows progress towards achieving the priorities to be measured. It also allows service plans to be updated as and when required in the light of changing circumstances and information.
- 44 Council priorities are reviewed annually in the light of consultation exercises and other intelligence about emerging issues. Each year key actions for the following year are selected within the ten policy areas of the corporate plan, and these have detailed targets. The Council has also developed a range of strategies to cover specific service areas and to provide a cross-cutting programme to ensure that the priorities are delivered and support each other.
- 45 Action to ensure delivery of priorities includes robust arrangements with partners. Examples are with Newcastle City Council on the housing market pathfinder, and with the police to combat crime and anti-social behaviour. The Council has refocused its grants programme to voluntary and community groups to ensure that they better support the delivery of council priorities. Although the Council explained this to partners in a number of ways, the reasons for the changes were not clearly understood by all partners.

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- 46** It is not always easy to follow how the Council's priorities are being delivered due to the overly complicated arrangement of plans, with language, definitions, and presentation being inconsistent. The Council does not always set out clearly the impact on existing services of reallocating resources, or make it clear what are no longer priorities.
- 47** The political leadership and management are clear about what the Council is trying to achieve and provide the strategic direction for delivery against this agenda. This is supported by cross-cutting portfolios for officers and councillors, with the latter being based on the ten thematic areas in the community strategy and corporate plan. Members of the Cabinet also have secondary roles in supporting at least one other portfolio area. This reinforces awareness of cross-cutting issues and has resulted in a corporate approach to issues and the identification of links at an early stage.
- 48** The Council has solid mechanisms for gathering the views of partners, communities, and users in order to receive feedback on whether its ambitions and priorities are being achieved. This allows the wider community and partners to have an influence on changing local priorities and feed into new strategies, such as through the Planning for Real exercise in Birtley.
- 49** The financial position of the Council is secure in the medium term. It has a three-year budget plan, the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) that demonstrates how the Council can deliver its service plans until 2008/09. It takes account of projected income and expenditure and known changes from Council policy decisions and external drivers, as well as reflecting the Council's decision to redirect £12 million over three years. The MTFS combines with other plans to demonstrate the links between the identified need for action and the action being taken. Remedial plans are produced for any area that has exceeded budget, such as for Special Educational Needs. However, the links between its financial resources and the delivery of its priorities is not clear in all its plans and strategies, although the shift in patterns of overall spending are consistent with objectives in the corporate plan.
- 50** The role of the MTFS in financial planning for the longer term is less developed or clear. It is not explicit about how the Council accommodate significant pressures such as the costs of future waste management arrangements. Nor does it demonstrate how the Council can achieve its aspiration to end its reliance on general reserves to support revenue spending. The Council has recognised that the MTFS needs to be updated and will do this as part of the planned review of *Towards 2010*, but until that is done, it will not provide councillors and managers with a sufficiently accurate picture of the Council's financial health in or beyond 2008/09 to enable them accurately to model how priorities can be addressed in the longer term.

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

Capacity

- 51 The Council is performing well in this area.
- 52 The Council has taken action to ensure that it has the capacity it needs to deliver its ambitions and priorities. Councillor and officer relationships are good, and challenge is provided through a robust scrutiny function. Partnership working is particularly strong and has enhanced the capacity of the Council to deliver on its priorities. Although improving, weaknesses remain in aspects of risk management, value for money and procurement.
- 53 There is strong and visible councillor and officer leadership. Councillors and officers work well together, respect each other and generally adhere to areas for which they are responsible. The delegation scheme sets out a clear framework to ensure that executive members focus on strategic issues. Cabinet meetings demonstrate a clear understanding of the impact on the wider community of items for decision and a commitment to diversity. Decision-making is transparent with a well established system for getting items into the Forward Plan. This has resulted in staff feeling that senior managers have a clear vision of where the council is going.
- 54 The Council's political arrangements reflect the modernised approach. There is regular reporting of information to portfolio holders, but not all portfolio holders make full use of information to challenge and ensure performance is managed effectively. The Council also makes use of advisory groups - to which any non-executive member can belong - to contribute to policy making. This helps to ensure wide ownership of policy.
- 55 Scrutiny is effective. The role of the five Overview and Scrutiny Committees includes reviewing policy and performance, and holding inquiries into matters affecting local people. This covers services that are not provided by the Council, such as the range of services for people with diabetes. External partners and the public are involved in giving evidence, but not used formally as part of the committees. Impact is clear, for example, the establishment after a review of a specialist post to promote action learning for children and young people. The Council has responded effectively to the ethical framework and the standards committee works well. Councillors and Officers work within the ethical framework and receive training including regular refresher courses.

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- 56** Risk management is developing, and now explicitly forms part of service plans. The ability has been demonstrated to respond to business risks and operate contingency plans, for example in dealing with information technology problems in the Benefits service. It is not evident how other issues, such as future costs of waste disposal and the implications of equal pay on trading services, are fully taken into account.
- 57** Arrangements for securing value for money are improving. Councillors and managers are beginning to routinely use available information to review and challenge VfM across services, and service planning has recently been strengthened in this respect. There are examples of increasing resources to support services which are performing poorly at delivering priorities, and actions to reduce costs on high spending services through changing the delivery arrangements, such as in housing repairs and maintenance.
- 58** The Human Resource (HR) Strategy and policies are helping to build capacity among councillors and officers by increasing their competences and skills. HR practices, including training and development for councillors and staff, are regularly reviewed and linked to corporate strategies and priorities. The Council has considered the needs of its diverse communities in policy development, employment practices, and service delivery, although staff composition is not yet reflective of the local community. Action has been taken to improve representation through more targeted advertising and a BME staff group has been established to look at barriers. Recruitment and retention are not generally issues for the Council. The Council also leads by example, and recently won the BBC's award as the region's healthiest large employer. However, it has yet to have a significant impact on its own sickness levels, which in 2004/05 were in the worst 25 per cent of councils, and affects the overall capacity of the Council to deliver its services.
- 59** A corporate procurement infrastructure is now in place and delivering results which can be evidenced. The Council is meeting many of the requirements of the National Procurement Strategy, and progress is being made in areas where the need for improvement has been identified, such as the further analysis and categorisation of suppliers. A detailed skills analysis has been undertaken across the organisation to inform future training.
- 60** Partnership work is increasing capacity and the Council is developing support processes for partnerships, including the further development of arrangements to improve probity and governance. The Council regularly reviews the effectiveness of partnership arrangements and integrated performance management is being developed with the GSP. The Council does not deliver all services itself, and selects partners in line with its priorities.
- 61** Communication with partners could be better in some areas. At times there is uncertainty amongst partners about what the Council intends to do following consultation. For example, partners were complimentary about consultation on the draft Older People's Strategy but did not know how or when decisions would be made to finalise it. This issue has been recognised by the Council in their new external communications strategy.

- 62 The financial position of the Council is sound overall. The Council has the financial capacity to deliver on its priorities within its current planning timescale. It has a general reserve of around £8 million and earmarked reserves of around £53 million. It is dependent on reserves to support its revenue spending, but aspires to balance its budget by 2009/10.
- 63 The Council has a strong track record in securing external funding to increase capacity; through improving its housing management it has secured £232 million towards delivering the decent homes standard. There is also a £200 million schools building programme through PFI and Building Schools for the Future, the latter being a joint project with South Tyneside MBC. It has made good use of external advisors to supplement in-house expertise in negotiating these contracts. It has processes in place for dealing with the tapering or ending of external funding, and the external funding schedule forms an integral part of the MTFS and is informed by individual service plans.
- 64 The Council is improving its approach to managing and prioritising projects. Efficiencies have been obtained through the effective use of ICT. The IEG statement 2004/05 indicates that the Council uses e-government to deliver objectives and service improvements, with ICT being used to provide real-time management information about service use. Access to services is being improved. This includes through electronic means, such as the re-designed website; the use of electronic kiosks throughout the borough, and the development of local multi-agency centres. The Council has focused on redesigning services in order to improve accessibility rather than building modifications, and although access for disabled people to council facilities is improving, progress has been slow.

Performance management

- 65 The Council's performance in this area is adequate.
- 66 Performance management is not consistent across all services and priorities. The Council is developing an integrated policy, service planning and performance management process. Councillors are closely involved in managing performance, good use of the complaints process to drive improvement and the Council can demonstrate some real service improvements. Weaknesses include target and outcome setting, demonstrating impact, and the lack of consistent involvement of the public and partners in setting specific service standards and targets.
- 67 Performance management is not yet consistent across all services. There is evidence of strong improvement in a number of areas, but there are still areas of poor performance. Many BVPIs are in the bottom two quartiles and many have not improved relative to other councils over the period 2002/03 to 2004/05. Within a number of services there are examples of performance not being effectively dealt with in the past, as with the high level of waste arisings or council tax collected, or the mixed performance in dealing with planning applications during past years. The Council is tackling these and other areas, and recent unaudited performance information indicates consistent improvement over the past year, although comparisons with other councils are not yet available.

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- 68** The Council has recently reviewed and updated its framework and guidance for performance management and service planning, together with a new template for service plans for 2006/07. This performance management framework provides a good foundation for the future. The focus of performance management is at the service head level. They receive regular, updated financial and performance information, although not yet fully integrated, and use it to inform the monthly 'red flag' sessions in order to identify corrective action if performance is off-track. Progress against key targets is monitored and reported through Group Management Teams, with six-monthly reports to Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Other information is monitored at more frequent intervals, including quarterly financial information to Cabinet and fortnightly information for the Portfolio Holder.
- 69** Target setting is not robust in all areas. Not all outcome measures and targets are challenging or consistent throughout the various plans, or demonstrate all the attributes of being SMART. Many measures focus on processes rather than impact. The Council has agreed a range of targets for each of its priorities and actions aimed at achieving them. This includes both national and local indicators. Outcome measures are included, although these are mainly in broad terms whilst local indicators are mainly output measures of activity. It has yet to develop measures of impact consistently across all its plans and strategies in order to be clear about what is being achieved or not achieved. There are some areas of good practice, such as the recent action plan for homelessness, which clearly sets out outcomes, targets, and milestones. In the latest audited performance information a large number of targets are either missed, (for example for affordable housing) or are not challenging enough (such as recycling, where performance is already at the target for 2007/08). The Council is aware of this variability and has reviewed how targets are set to ensure that they are more challenging and stretching and better owned by staff and there are indications in unaudited information that the position is improving.
- 70** Performance management arrangements with partners are developing. Examples of this includes target setting for both the GSP and Council done in tandem, and the development of the LAA targets, as well as monitoring by the Older People's Partnership of the achievement of NSF targets. Partners take responsibility for providing regular performance information, monitoring performance and for the delivery of outcomes within the GSP thematic partnerships. This enabled the Council to achieve its stretched targets under the LPSA1.
- 71** There is a strong commitment by the Council to equality and diversity and it has in place a range of mechanisms both internal and external to improve its performance in these areas. However, it has yet to demonstrate the outcomes arising from its work in terms of clear impacts on local people.
- 72** There are various benchmarking arrangements in place, such as the OCTOPUS group for asset management, which identifies strengths and weaknesses of performance, shares best practice and aims to improve performance. The Children and Young People Partnership also uses benchmarking extensively to drive improvement, with reviews under Supporting People using national and regional benchmarking data.

- 73 Partners and the public are involved in shaping the Council's policies. Partners in particular are involved in setting priorities and targets through the LAA, and help to review the stretched targets and to agree the distribution of the expected reward element. Service users are involved in shaping policy and at a local level in identifying small scale initiatives, but service standards are generally set by the Council with little or no involvement of service users.
- 74 The Council sees comments and complaints as an important part of performance management. A new procedure was introduced in 2004 which made it easier for people to express their views. The new computerised procedure makes it easier to both track and respond to complaints and comments. An annual report is published, which highlights how complaints have been used to drive service improvements. Such improvements include the revision of the layout of benefit notification letters, and the provision of more employees at key times for appointments. This has led to an increase in the satisfaction level of those complaining.

What has been achieved?

- 75 Overall, the Council is performing well in this area.
- 76 The Council's vision for Gateshead and its high level priorities cover all the areas of the five shared priorities, and improvements can be seen across each of these, although progress is more marked in some areas than others. However, satisfaction with the Council and its services is high across the board.
- 77 The Council is tackling the significant deprivation that is evident in parts of the borough. It has bid for and achieved significant external funding in some wards. Partnership working is particularly strong, both locally and regionally, which has increased the Council's capacity to deliver on its priorities. It is strong at identifying linkages between these priorities and ensuring measures in different areas support each other.
- 78 The Council has focused on regeneration and has seen this as a comprehensive approach to delivering on its agenda. Much has been achieved in terms of physical change, and in creating a 'sense of place' and confidence amongst the communities in Gateshead. New jobs have been created in line with the Council's emphasis on economic regeneration and improving worklessness. Environmental improvements have been seen as important, including the use of iconic projects such as the Angel of the North, The Sage Gateshead, and the Millennium Bridge. Housing renewal is taking place and work with the diverse communities is improving. There has been less success in reducing inequalities between areas of Gateshead. The Council is intending to focus in future more at the neighbourhood level in order to further address these issues.
- 79 Significant progress has been made in crime reduction, but work in other areas, such as dealing with anti-social behaviour and alcohol reduction is hampered by the lack of clear targets to evaluate achievement of the identified outcome measures. Health outcomes are being achieved in the context of a legacy of poor health, and this is an area where partnership working is very strong. The Council has taken a strategic approach to older people's needs and its approach now ranges well beyond health and social care and is firmly based on issues important to older people. The area of children and young people has many positive outcomes and overall was seen as being good.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 80 The Council has a clear vision for creating sustainable communities. The local context is one of areas of dereliction, substandard housing, poor health, a low skills base, and low incomes for many households. The Council places a high value on regeneration, and received beacon status for this approach to regeneration through the use of culture. The lack until recently of an overarching regeneration strategy covering the whole of the borough has made it difficult to assess the effectiveness of planned interventions in improving quality of life in Gateshead.

In contrast, where one has been in place, as for East Gateshead since 1997 (as part of a ten-year SRB programme), tangible benefits from planned actions can be seen in creating a more sustainable economy and community.

- 81 There is increasing recognition of a 'sense of place' amongst both residents and partners. This is changing perceptions of Gateshead both within and outside the borough, stimulating the sub-regional economy and leading to increased inward investment such as the International Business Centre, growth of the Metro Centre and improvements to the Team Valley estate. The number of jobs available in Gateshead rose from 84,000 in 2001 to 95,500 in 2004.
- 82 Although there has been an increase in jobs and reduced unemployment, the position for those in the more deprived areas is deteriorating. Economic inactivity rates in these areas are rising, linked to low skills and poor educational attainment. There is a focus on educational attainment in schools and colleges, but the impact so far has not been uniform across the borough. The council has various schemes to help long-term unemployed people and those on incapacity benefit into work and also to improve skills. It has good links with BME groups, such as the Gateshead African Community Association, to ensure information concerning vacancies and education reaches all communities. Although there has been a steady improvement in the number of VAT registered businesses the gap between Gateshead and the rest of the country is increasing, although as a whole it is still out-performing the average for the North East.
- 83 The Council has clear ambitions for housing, and partnership working is seen as key to achieving these. The housing strategy links to the community strategy and corporate plan and is part of a multi-disciplinary approach to improving the quality of life for Gateshead residents. It sets out clear priorities based on up-to-date information and includes links to community safety and older people's themes. For example, this has led to the delivery of new older people's accommodation and an increase in shared ownership, and also the realisation that the prevention of homelessness is a positive contribution to the local health agenda. The Council has integrated the strategies of the housing market renewal pathfinder partnership - Bridging NewcastleGateshead (BNG) - with its own and that of other partners to increase impact.
- 84 The Council has improved the performance of the ALMO. This has led to the release of additional Government funding - £64 million over the next two years - for achieving the Decent Homes Standard by 2010 for the Council's housing stock. It is improving working with diverse groups in housing provision, such as targeted work to tackle issues associated with communities such as BME, travellers and asylum seekers, supporting vulnerable tenants, and improving affordable housing in its rural communities, as well as implementing initiatives to tackle crime and ASB in its housing areas. Housing performance overall is improving as a result of these actions. Issues remain around the provision of affordable housing.

- 85 The Council has an integrated approach to ensure environmentally sustainable communities and lifestyle through its Agenda 21 Strategy. It is working with local communities to raise the awareness of sustainability issues, including a well-developed programme aimed at schools and young people. There are various schemes to enhance the environmental quality of the borough, such as the creation of five new Local Nature Reserves, the Northern Kites project, and improvement of the quality of the River Tyne environment. It is investing in providing and improving areas of public space, with Saltwell Park winning the award for Britain's Best Park in 2005 following completion of its restoration. There are good links with BNG in tackling graffiti and other anti-social behaviour, and recent action on litter and dog fouling in Birtley has resulted in improvements recognised by local people.
- 86 Air quality is being monitored, and there are generally no issues except around the approaches to the Town Centre and a heavily congested section of the A1 by-pass. The Council is placing increasing priority on dealing with waste and recycling, which with composting has risen from 5 per cent in 2002/03 to just over 20 per cent in 2005/06 (latter figure is unaudited). The draft waste management strategy fits with good practice. However, the amount of waste arisings continues to increase and recycling although meeting current Government targets is not anticipated to increase markedly in the future.
- 87 The Council is addressing issues of social exclusion and congestion in the borough through encouraging sustainable transport solutions, and has a range of partnerships aimed at reducing car usage within the borough. The new Local Transport Plan includes a holistic strategy to improve accessibility to key services - healthcare, employment, food retail and education - across the conurbation. Transport is also seen as having a major role in supporting the housing market renewal pathfinder. Pump priming funding has been obtained for Tyne and Wear to develop a longer term strategy for managing traffic growth (Transport Innovation Fund).
- 88 The Council has established school travel plans for around 50 per cent of schools, and has improved facilities for cyclists and pedestrians, including facilities for disabled people at pedestrian crossings. There is a green travel plan for Council employees, but it has not made a significant impact on reducing their car usage. Public transport schemes have improved links to Gateshead Quays and between the Metro Centre and bus services in the centre of Gateshead. Transport corridor schemes have been implemented. These approaches have helped reduce the rate at which public transport usage is declining.

Safer and stronger communities

- 89 The Council works well through a range of partnerships to achieve its priorities for safer and stronger communities. These include the Community Safety Partnership, the Domestic Violence Partnership, a multi-agency ASBO panel, and the Drug and Alcohol Action Team. There is good understanding of their respective roles by the partners and close co-ordination of activities. The third community safety strategy, for 2005-2008, is comprehensive and accessible and contains clear priorities and targets, including some joint targets with the police.
- 90 The Council demonstrates a comprehensive approach in using its services, such as the planning system, transport, and housing, to contribute to its safer, stronger agenda. It recognises the need to address environmental and economic concerns as well as core crime if it is going to have a sustainable and long term impact on crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB). An example is the use of environmental improvement schemes to help design crime out of housing areas, with a budget of £546,000 for 2005/06.
- 91 Partners recognise the priority the Council places on safer and stronger communities and its contribution through a range of initiatives. These include the Prolific and Priority Offenders scheme which targets those most likely to commit crime and cause offence, and an intelligence-led and multi-agency approach to local neighbourhood issues, such as door-to-door surveys to identify problem residents. Activities have been co-ordinated between partners to make them more effective, such as linking the operation of the scheme for neighbourhood wardens with Gateshead Housing Company officers, police, and Community Support Officers to give a higher visible uniformed presence.
- 92 Area action plans provide an outline of current and future activity along with the outcomes to show the Council and its partners whether they are achieving the desired impact from more targeted measures. This has resulted in significant reductions in crime over the last two years. Gateshead compares well within its CDRP family group, being third or fourth lowest in five of the six key categories of crime. There has also been a decrease in residents reporting feeling threatened by crime in their neighbourhood (27.6 per cent in 2005 compared to 40.3 per cent in 2002) and high levels of satisfaction with community safety.
- 93 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act requiring the Council to consider the impact of all its actions on preventing crime and disorder has yet to be firmly established across all services. An action plan is being developed, and an audit carried out on the draft service plans for 2006/07 to provide evidence of how the Council is currently meeting its responsibilities in this area.
- 94 The Council has a good track record in acting as a community leader in reducing anti-social behaviour in Gateshead and works well with partners. This includes tackling domestic violence, seeking to get drug users into treatment and rehabilitation, and developing diversionary schemes in conjunction with Sport England. Many of these initiatives have only been recently established and their impact on levels of anti-social behaviour has yet to be established.

The Council has an ASB strategy in place, structured around the key themes of prevention, education, community support and engagement, enforcement and rehabilitation and a detailed action plan has been produced and an ASB Forum established to monitor progress. However, there is a lack of clear targets to evaluate achievement of the identified outcome measures.

- 95 An Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy has been agreed with partners. The Drugs and Alcohol Team (DAAT) annual Adult Treatment Plan continues to be recognised as 'green'. The DAAT has exceeded national targets for numbers in treatment through the commissioning and development of treatment services.
- 96 The Council has achieved good progress in making a safer Gateshead. There are strong links between neighbourhood wardens and the fire service's arson task force to deal with empty properties, and this has had a significant impact in reducing arson in them. Neighbourhood wardens help to identify abandoned vehicles and use the Council's powers to get them removed quickly. Major improvements, supported by the LPSA, have led to a reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured on Gateshead's roads from an average of 134 per year (1998) to 80 (2004).
- 97 The Council's approach to the resilience agenda is detailed in its emergency plan. This is linked to business continuity plans and co-ordinated with other Tyneside authorities. The Council has developed a framework for the development of corporate and service business continuity plans, and there are up-to-date risk assessments. The Council has validated emergency arrangements but has yet to do so for service continuity, although this is planned for summer 2006. The Council is also actively promoting business continuity within the borough.
- 98 The Council is developing neighbourhood planning and management in order to build stronger communities. There is a recently approved Community Cohesion Strategy based on wide consultation, and this is reflected in some existing work such as the approach to anti-social behaviour. There is progress in tackling some of the specific issues experienced by BME groups, although the reasons for why progress is sometimes slow need to be more clearly explained to groups. The Council and its partners are aware of the low level harassment that is experienced by some minority communities on a frequent basis and are putting various structures in place to make reporting easier and to help address this problem. This includes the establishment of a Racist Incident Steering Group to ensure that the recording and response to racist incidents is effectively co-ordinated amongst the partners involved.

Healthier communities

- 99** The Council works well to improve the health of the local community and has achieved good outcomes linked to its priorities. This is within the context of a legacy of health outcomes in Gateshead being historically well below average. Many are now improving, often in line with national trends, but with better progress in the areas of coronary heart disease and some cancers. The Council is also working to improve the 'wider determinants of health' by raising educational attainment, improving housing and the environment and bringing jobs to local people.
- 100** The Council has a mature approach to the health agenda and is prepared to question the traditional way services have been provided. It is involved in a broad range of initiatives, which routinely transcend the traditional 'health agenda' and which are integrated into the wider activities of the Council and its partners. It is clear on the links between the various thematic areas. For example, 'extra care' housing provided by Housing 21 provides an alternative to residential and nursing homes, and facilities are being provided in community centres for health visitors to provide services to mothers and young children. Librarians have been trained to deal with questions about health-related services and, in line with the shared ambition of the Council and the PCT that 'every contact will be a health-related contact', a programme has been devised to train front-line staff to give basic anti-smoking advice. Health professionals can refer patients to trained staff within the Council's sport and leisure services in cases where increased physical activity would be beneficial. About 350 people have been through that programme.
- 101** The Council has very strong, well established relationships with partner organisations in the NHS and the voluntary sector. The commitment of councillors and officers to improving the health of the community is evident. The main partnership for health is the recently restructured Gateshead Health & Social Care Partnership which has developed a clear focus of shared priorities amongst its members for the period 2004-2007. The Council is a Beacon Council for health promotion. It is also a Shared Priority Pathfinder and participates in the Unique Care Contracting Collaborative, an initiative of the National Primary Care Development Team and involves working with two GP practices in Gateshead to develop a co-ordinated care approach for patients with complex needs. Many programmes are already delivered by or in partnership with the voluntary sector, such as health walks, the Peer Activity Motivator scheme, and 'Live at Home' voluntary visiting schemes.
- 102** Health-related initiatives are also evident in the Council's strategies for older people and for young people, for example, the Street 2 Stadium initiative to reduce the perceived elitism at the International Sports Stadium. The GOAL (Gateshead Opportunities for Active Lifestyles) Scheme is managed by the PCT and delivered by Gateshead Council. This is aimed at referrals of patients by GPs where they have been identified with two or more risk factors for heart disease and other illnesses. The Council supports a healthy living magazine written for and by the Orthodox Jewish Community, and distributed to Jewish communities across the country.

- 103** The Council has good arrangements for monitoring performance against its own health-related objectives. The latest statistics (2004/05) show an improving trend (60 per cent of indicators improved from 2003/04, or already at 100 per cent, and 80 per cent of targets met). More recent unvalidated data suggests further improvement in 2005/06 including a continuing reversal of the adverse trend in teenage conception. The Council, however, formally measures only 21 indicators, of which five are essentially environmental health indicators. It could do more to formally monitor and assess the impact of the much more extensive range of health-related activities with which it is involved, including those where at the present time it can only track inputs and outputs rather than outcomes. Information is shared between partners, and has been well used to identify the health challenges faced by local people. More detailed neighbourhood data is currently lacking. Without this it is not clear how improvements have taken place with respect to the diverse communities of interest and geography in the borough, and whether inequalities within Gateshead are also narrowing, and hence where best to target intervention.

Older people

- 104** The Council and its partners take a strategic approach to understanding and meeting older people's needs. This followed a fundamental review of care services for older people in 1999 and a five-year modernisation programme. The Council's approach now ranges well beyond health and social care and is firmly based on the issues older people say are important to them. A special Older People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been established and an Older People's strategy is being prepared. Although a wide range of services is provided for older people, in the absence of a fully worked up strategy it is unclear whether they are yet fully comprehensive or co-ordinated.
- 105** Meaningful engagement has been achieved with older people, especially through the Older People's Forum, which has over 800 members, and with Age Concern and other voluntary organisations. A wide range of consultation events have been held, including an inter-generational event jointly held by the Older People's Forum and Young People's Assembly. These links are being further developed.
- 106** A survey of older people by the Older Persons Forum in 2004 raised a number of issues covering health, leisure, community safety, and transport. This information has been used as the starting point for the Older Peoples' Strategy. An embryonic Older People's strategy has been approved for consultation by Cabinet, and is due to be in place by the autumn. The consultation will also feed into the Council's equality strategy. An action plan will then be required to be developed and a monitoring process established. Until this is done it is not possible to evaluate whether the range of services provided by the Council for older people is yet fully comprehensive or co-ordinated.

- 107** The Council has demonstrated its commitment to improving the independence of older people through innovative social care and housing provision. These involve close working with partners, such as Housing 21 to provide extra care housing in the shape of four schemes of 40 rented apartments connected with assistive technology and various facilities which are also open to the local community. External funding from the Department of Health and Housing 21 has been achieved for the re-modelling of Callender Court into an extra care scheme. The Council also runs mental health day services in a number of communities. However, although progress has been made in involving older people in sheltered schemes, ways of working with isolated older people on housing issues on its remoter estates are less well developed.
- 108** A housing strategy for older people is in place. Links are made from the housing strategy for older people to the Supporting People strategy. Independence and flexible support are key elements. This has resulted in a drop in older people entering nursing/care homes (261 in 2004/05 compared with 416 in 2002/03), despite a growing number of older people in the population. The Council uses the planning system to help deliver on its priority of social support and care to older people. This includes producing supplementary planning guidance dealing with the provision of lifetime housing which will allow easy conversion for older people's use and hence maintain the quality of life for older people and the sustainability of existing communities.
- 109** There are some targeted initiatives aimed at BME groups, such as day care service designed to meet the cultural needs of older Chinese people. Gateshead is also helping build capacity of some voluntary organisations to allow them to develop additional services, for example the Jewish community organisation developing a new service for older people with Supporting People short-term revenue funding.
- 110** Social care provision is strong with a three-star rating from CSCI and particular strengths identified in relation to promoting independence. A new resource for older people with mental health needs has been opened. There is a five-year programme to address fuel poverty for all households by 2010. A number of initiatives have been taken to promote the health of older people, and there is evidence that falls have been reduced. These include activities such as the 'Health through Art' programme. A proposal for a pilot (Link Age Plus) for delivering low level preventative services to older people throughout Gateshead has been put forward by a wide range of partners, and is awaiting imminent DWP approval.
- 111** The Council is responding to the needs and aspirations of older people. This includes working with its partners - such as the Pension Service - to unify benefits administration, and with voluntary organisations to run campaigns aimed at ensuring the take-up of benefits. There is targeted work aimed at increasing the involvement of older people in cultural and leisure activities. This approach includes the provision of library facilities as an integral part of the Sage Gateshead development. The use of cultural facilities by older people is in the best quartile. There is a high level of satisfaction among older people with the council and overall improvement of services.

The performance indicator for older people helped to live at home is at the level of the best 25 per cent of councils and improving, as well as for how well informed over 55s feel about benefits and services provided by the Council.

Children and young people

- 112 Gateshead Council demonstrates a strong commitment to children and young people and has made 'children and young people' one of the ten themes of the community strategy, *Towards 2010*.
- 113 Gateshead has strong partnership arrangements and these have been effective at improving services for children and young people. The Children and Young People's Plan is ambitious and has clear priorities. Overall, services for children and young people provide adequate value for money. The Council and its partners work well with Black and minority ethnic communities and there is good understanding of community needs.
- 114 The health of children and young people in Gateshead is generally good. Health promotion is effective and the area has achieved Beacon Status for promoting Healthy Communities. The number of mothers breast-feeding is increasing at a higher rate than the national average and teenage pregnancies are falling at a greater rate than the national average. There is a good range of services on offer for children and young people in need of child and adolescent mental health services. Young people currently have to access some adolescent inpatient facilities and sexual health provision from a neighbouring authority. There is effective multi-agency working to meet the needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- 115 Children and young people appear safe. Systems and processes for assessment and care management including those for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effective and timely. Inter-agency working relationships are good. However, some care leavers feel they would like more choice of accommodation. The Council and its partners are addressing bullying and harassment in schools. However, children and young people report feeling unsafe in local parks and open spaces and some Orthodox Jewish children and young people experience racism. A small number of children and young people remain too long in situations that do not best meet their needs and there is a high proportion of re-registrations on the child protection register. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is aware of this and has made addressing neglect a key priority area in its work plans.
- 116 The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people enjoy and achieve well is good. Good advice and guidance about educational provision is available to parents and carers. Early years provision is very good. Most children are doing very well at the time they leave primary school. Young people achieving five or more A*-C grades in their GCSE examinations is impressive and they are among the best performing in the country. However, there is a wide variation in the achievement at both primary and secondary levels with some schools performing below national averages.

The rate at which children and young people are re-integrated back into mainstream education is better than that of similar areas and nationally. Looked after children receive an adequate education and there are indications that improvements are being made.

- 117** The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. School councils exist in all schools and there is an effective youth forum. Opportunities for children and young people to support each other through mentoring schemes are good. Transition arrangements for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities moving from children's to adult services are improving with the provision of targeted support. Offending rates are reducing. The offending rates of looked after young people are lower than that of similar areas. The impact of the youth service for some vulnerable groups of young people is variable.
- 118** The overall contribution of services to help children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. Childcare is good and accessible for most parents and carers. Effective initiatives are in place to improve numeracy and literacy levels for parents and carers. The Connexions service provides young people with clear, objective advice and information. However, a few young people follow programmes that are not best suited to their needs. The strategies in place to develop education for 14 –19 year olds are good and there is increasing collaboration between partners, particularly in developing vocational provision. The number of young people leaving care who continue in education, employment or training is improving and is above national comparators. The take up of direct payments is low. Gateshead Council has kept the needs of children and young people high on a very successful regeneration agenda and children and young people are benefiting from these initiatives.

Appendix 1 - Framework for Corporate Assessment

- 1 This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under Section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2 The Council's self assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
 - key documentation, including the Council's improvement plan;
 - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
 - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 8-17 May 2006.
- 4 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the Council.