

Corporate Assessment Report

August 2006



Corporate Assessment

Medway Council

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

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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 Overall, Medway Council is performing well. The Council has a challenging but realistic ambition to develop 'a city of learning, culture, tourism and enterprise for the Thames Gateway' within 20 years. This ambition is endorsed by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and is supported by clear priorities which, despite a lack of consistency in the way priorities are expressed in Council documents, are clearly understood by staff, partners and stakeholders.
- 6 The Council's ambition is based on a good understanding of local needs. This understanding is informed by regular and effective consultation that includes an annual survey of residents conducted by an independent organisation and canvassing the views of the Citizen's Panel, comprising 1,500 residents and forums representing minority groups such as the Ethnic Minority Forum, Access Forum for people with disabilities and Youth Parliament.
- 7 The Council does not clearly differentiate between its core values and its priorities. Despite this the ambitions for the area do flow logically into the Council's priorities, notably regeneration. This is focussed on developing 14 key sites covering 920 hectares. To respond positively to local needs the Council has successfully made social regeneration a fundamental part of its regeneration plans and has worked with residents to produce neighbourhood action plans for each of the three most deprived parts of the area. Similarly the Council's 'Customer First' programme has strengthened the Council's focus on users by providing a customer contact centre, local service points in each of the main towns and improved web site facilities.
- 8 The Council demonstrates a strong commitment to diversity. It consults well with minority and disadvantaged communities and supports a number of organisations to promote racial and social harmony, notably the Inter Faith Forum. Council services are sensitive to the needs of minority and disadvantaged groups - examples include employing a specialist care worker in the care and repair agency skilled in observing cultural requirements of ethnic minorities and working with a housing association which specialises in meeting housing needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. The Council also supports a number of annual events that promote understanding between groups including Black History Month and the older person's festival 'Celebrating Age'. A weakness in the otherwise good analytical work done by the Council is that it does not know enough about the particular health needs of BME groups.

- 9 The Council uses its existing capacity effectively and is working hard to build future capacity. It has an excellent track record at attracting external funding having attracted in excess of £150 million over the past five years. The Chief Executive provides clear leadership and other strategic managers lead and manage staff well. This contributes to well motivated, committed and hard working staff who are supported by effective personal development systems. An exception to this is in children's care services where recruitment and retention difficulties cause staff to experience work pressures. A recent organisational restructuring is beginning to deliver better corporate working by breaking down departmental barriers.
- 10 The Council works with partners to provide effective community leadership. These include campaigns to preserve existing arrangements for police and health authorities that serve the area well, securing agreement for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link to stop in Medway and action to protect the local environment.
- 11 Political leadership is effective overall despite a clear weakness in children's social care. The Leader played an important role influencing decision-makers to secure the required outcomes described in the preceding paragraph. Cabinet councillors provide clear direction to strategic managers in most areas through weekly meetings. An important exception to this is children's social care where key weaknesses were not tackled for some time. Scrutiny committees successfully influence policy formulation through cross party task groups. All councillors are involved in monitoring performance and identifying opportunities for improved service delivery. These measures ensure that all councillors are involved in policy formulation and performance review.
- 12 Whilst the Council's partnership working is generally positive there are opportunities to strengthen this area. The Council, LSP and other stakeholders are working together towards achieving their shared ambition to create a city of Medway. Examples include working with government agencies and the private and voluntary sectors to deliver economic and social regeneration. The Council also engages well with statutory partners notably in community safety and health where there are many examples of good partnership working. However the LSP agenda can be Council dominated and the Council does not have an agreement or understanding with the voluntary sector on the role it has to play in delivering the ambitions for the area and the consequent support the Council will provide.
- 13 The Council manages its finances well. Council tax levels are among the lowest nationally and the Council has sound budget setting and monitoring procedures. The Council is delivering value for money on most services. The Council was judged to be 'performing well' in the recent Use of Resources assessment.
- 14 Performance management is inconsistent. Although the Council has developed a comprehensive performance management framework it is not applied in all areas, notably children's care services. Links between resource management and performance management are weak. The Council is keen to learn from other organisations and customer feedback. Corporate 'core value' groups are effective at managing performance in cross cutting activities such as value for money, environment and equalities. However the Council does not systematically review performance with LSP partners in areas of joint interest.

- 15 The Council's achievements against national and local priorities are inconsistent. It has achieved much in economic and social regeneration and has clear and ambitious plans to continue this success. Notable achievements include creating Universities@Medway and initiatives to improve health and employment services for residents, particularly in deprived areas. These achievements are supported by good work contributing to safer and more cohesive communities although there are shortcomings in affordable housing, services for older people and transport. Services for children and young people are adequate overall although there are significant weaknesses in children's social care, particularly around measures to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect. The Council acknowledges its weaknesses and is developing detailed plans to improve performance.

Areas for improvement

- 16 The Council needs to work with partners to improve the effectiveness of the LSP. It should adopt a less directive role to enable other partners to contribute more fully and work with partners to secure more resources and improve performance management.
- 17 The Council needs to describe its key priorities clearly and consistently in strategic plans and distinguish them from its core values.
- 18 The Council needs to identify measures to tackle the current and future shortfall on the provision of affordable housing for example using the Local Development Framework to maximise the potential for delivering affordable housing.
- 19 The Council needs to identify and implement measures to improve the transport infrastructure. These should include, but not be limited to, proposals included in its Local Transport Plan.
- 20 The Council needs to implement its corporate performance management framework across all services.
- 21 The Council needs to improve management processes and performance in children's social care services. Specific improvements should include arrangements to respond to referrals, case recording and associated management supervision, risk assessments, workload management and clarifying the threshold for the involvement of social care services.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	3
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	2
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

- 22** The area of Medway is situated in the south east of England 30 miles from the centre of London. It covers an area of 192 square kilometres and comprises the five towns of Rochester, Strood, Chatham, Gillingham and Rainham and surrounding rural areas. Medway is part of the Thames Gateway growth area and the Council and its partners are subject to a major programme of regeneration of brown field sites throughout the area, with particular focus on the waterfront sites along the river.'
- 23** Medway has a population of 251,100¹ of which approximately 85 per cent live in the five towns. White British people account for 92.2 per cent of the population, which is higher than the national and regional averages of 87 per cent and 91.3 per cent respectively. The next largest ethnic group is British/Indian at 2 per cent (regional average 1.1 per cent) and 1.5 per cent of the population are white non British. Other ethnic communities are represented in Medway but in relatively small numbers. Although Medway has a comparatively small proportion of ethnic minority residents the school population includes 9 per cent of primary school pupils and 8 per cent of secondary school students from these communities.
- 24** Employment patterns in Medway have changed dramatically over the past 20 years. Since the closure of Chatham dockyard in 1984, the area has seen gradual economic recovery and diversification. Service sectors now account for nearly 75 per cent of employment with tourism emerging as an important economic sector. Despite this, nearly 26 per cent of the area's working population commutes to work, mainly to London. Commuters tend to enjoy higher salaries than people who work locally who are more likely to be in low paid and low skilled jobs than in other parts of the south-east.
- 25** The proportion of people with no qualifications is consistent with the national average, but only 8.6 per cent of Medway residents are educated to degree level, compared to 14.4 per cent nationally. Educational aspiration and attainment have traditionally been low.
- 26** Levels of deprivation in Medway are fairly typical of the national average. The area is 172nd out of 354 areas nationally² (where 354 is the least deprived). At ward level the situation is more varied. There are some pockets of deprivation particularly in areas such as All Saints, Brook Lines in Chatham and Twydall in Gillingham, as well as some more affluent areas.

¹ Office of National Statistics 2004

² Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Indices of Deprivation 2004

- 27 Almost half of the area is rural including eight internationally or nationally designated areas of nature conservation. These include three country parks managed by the Council as well as important estuary and marsh habitats.
- 28 Affordable housing is a key issue for local people with demand outstripping supply. Despite the average house price in the area in 2005 (£153,365) being below the regional (£233,426) and national averages (£190,681) homelessness remains a problem. In 2003/04, 7.9 households per thousand were accepted as priority homeless exceeding the worst quartile nationally of 6.6 households per thousand.

The Council

- 29 Medway Council is a unitary council and was formed in 1998. It has 55 councillors representing 22 wards. In 2003 the Conservatives took overall control of the Council. They currently have 31 seats compared to Labour who won 16, the Liberal Democrats 6 and 2 independents.
- 30 The Council adopted the Cabinet style of governance in 2001. The Cabinet is made up of nine councillors from the Conservative Group. These councillors are known as portfolio holders and are responsible for different council activities³.
- 31 The Council reorganised its officer structure from 1 January 2006 to create a Chief Executive's Division and four directorates – Children's Services, Community Services, Regeneration and Development, and Finance and Corporate Services. There are four Overview and Scrutiny Committees that mirror the directorate structure.
- 32 The Council employs more than 6,500 people and its net revenue budget for 2006/07 is £299.5 million with a further £71 million to be spent on capital projects. The revenue budget represents a council tax increase of 5.5 per cent over 2005/06. The Council is currently appealing against a decision by the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to consider 'capping' this increase in council tax. In 2005/06 council tax at Band D was £1,069 which is below the national average of £1,195. The Council's council tax charge in 2005/06 was the second lowest of all mainland unitary authorities and the lowest in Kent.

³ The nine portfolios are ;Regeneration, democracy and governance; Finance; Adult Services; Children's services; Community Services; Customer First and Corporate Services; Front Line Services; Safer Communities and Strategic Development and Economic Growth.

- 33** The Council works with public, private and voluntary sector organisations in a range of different partnerships. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) comprises over 350 organisations and is chaired by the Leader of the Council. The LSP is currently reviewing its structure in preparation for negotiating a local area agreement. The Council also leads on the Medway Renaissance Partnership which co-ordinates projects to secure economic regeneration in the area. Under the terms of an arrangement with the ODPM (now Department for Communities and Local Government - DCLG) the Council manages projects on behalf of the partnership. The Council are also working with the PCT on a number of initiatives including sharing budgets to secure improvements for people with mental health and learning disabilities. Partnerships are also in place with the police, various private sector contractors and the Medway Ethnic Minority Forum.

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

Ambition

- 34 The Council is performing well in this area. It has worked with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to describe a clear and challenging vision for the Medway area based on the national priority for regeneration and growth known as the 'Thames Gateway' programme. The Council's ambition for Medway is for it to become ' a city of learning, culture, tourism and enterprise for the Thames Gateway.' This ambition is understood and endorsed by residents and other stakeholders who want to see Medway emerge as a centre of regional importance benefiting both existing and new communities. The Council has demonstrated effective community leadership and the ability to take difficult decisions in support of its ambition for the area and continued partnership working.
- 35 The Council is committed to ensuring that regeneration should benefit local people. It is linking physical and social regeneration to promote local pride and identity, and to reverse the detrimental impact of the closure of Chatham dockyard that led to a low wage economy, poor educational achievement and low self-esteem for many residents. The Council and its partners envisage that the area will be transformed during the next 20 years by the development of 14 key sites covering 920 hectares along an 11 kilometre stretch of the river Medway. This development programme is designed to deliver social and economic regeneration for local people and population growth from 250,000 to 300,000 with appropriate transport, economic, environmental and cultural facilities.
- 36 The Council's ambition is shared by key partners. The Council and the LSP worked together to develop an overall ambition for the area. Consequently the Community Plan reflects the Council's ambition by describing the LSP vision as 'to develop Medway into a fine and welcoming city: a city where people want to achieve in all aspects of their life, through work, leisure and learning'. Similarly key strategic partners have combined with the Council to form the Medway Renaissance Partnership to progress specific projects linked to regeneration. These include the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), who have developed the Medway Regeneration Framework with the Council, Medway PCT, who have formed a Local Investment Finance Trust to build new health centres throughout Medway and Universities@Medway who are committed to doubling student numbers. These initiatives demonstrate how the Council and its partners work towards a shared ambition thus increasing the chances of success.

- 37 The Council's ambitions are based on a good understanding of local needs that is shared with partners. It has effective ongoing mechanisms to engage with local people and understand their aspirations for the area. These include a Citizen's Panel of 1,500 residents, good engagement through a Pensioners Forum, Ethnic Minority Forum, Access Forum for people with disabilities and Youth Parliament as well as an annual survey of residents conducted by an independent organisation. In addition the Council consults on specific projects or topics of interest to particular communities or minority groups. Examples of this include the 'Communities Futures' programme that the Council and its partners are using to plan social regeneration in deprived areas - the 'Big Idea' canvassed the views of 1,000 young people to inform current and future service provision by the Council and voluntary groups and a citizen's workshop to influence the Council's future strategy on waste disposal. Much of the information derived from these activities is shared with partners. In this way the Council and its partners understand the needs and aspirations of local people and have used this information to help shape its ambitions for the area.
- 38 The Council provides effective community leadership in support of its ambition and to secure continued partnership working. The Council successfully lobbied for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link domestic services to stop in Medway from 2009 to enhance the area's future status as a regional centre with links to Europe. The Council also provides effective leadership to safeguard and support the environment. Examples include working with residents to protect a unique, historic landmark by creating the Great Lines City Park and resisting attempts to site an international airport on Cliffe Marshes in support of residents' views that this would be detrimental to future quality of life and destroy an important environmental site. The Council displays good community leadership to secure community cohesion by engaging with local ethnic minority groups and other minority or disadvantaged groups. It has strengthened partnership working with other public bodies for example through working with health bodies on Primary Care Trust restructuring and helping to secure agreement from the strategic health authority to locate a specialist kidney unit at Medway hospital.

Prioritisation

- 39 The Council performs well in prioritisation. It has a good information base from which to identify local needs and supplements this knowledge with extensive consultation and good engagement with stakeholders. It has identified ten priorities that accurately reflect national and local priorities and link well to the LSP's overall priorities for Medway. Council priorities are described in the Council's performance plan as being of equal importance although it is universally understood by all stakeholders that the key priorities are putting the customer first and regeneration. The Council has clear plans to deliver its strategic objectives and focuses its resources on these by linking service planning and budget cycles.

16 Corporate Assessment | What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 40** There are strong links between the Council's priorities and those of the LSP. The Council and the LSP worked closely to formulate overall priorities for Medway, and to ensure synergy with Council priorities. The Council's Performance Plan describes how Council activities support delivery of LSP objectives. This demonstrates the close correlation between LSP and Council priorities.
- 41** There is confusion in the performance plan about what are core values and what are Council priorities. However partners, staff and other stakeholders do understand the Council's corporate priorities and strategic objectives. The Council's ten corporate priorities until 2008 are:
- putting our customers at the heart of everything we do;
 - improve and maintain our local environment;
 - develop new sustainable communities and regenerate Medway to benefit existing communities;
 - reduce crime and anti-social behaviour;
 - work together to protect vulnerable children;
 - realise the potential of young people in Medway;
 - extend and develop the culture, tourism and leisure opportunities in Medway;
 - promote independence for vulnerable adults;
 - make it easier to travel around Medway; and
 - promote pride in Medway.

Although not explicitly stated the Council's key priorities are putting the customer first and regeneration. Council objectives in support of the ten priorities are described in service strategies and plans. These enable staff and stakeholders to understand how their actions help deliver Council and LSP priorities.

- 42** The Council has a good information base on which to determine its priorities for action. It makes good use of surveys such as the children's lifestyle survey and has a number of standing groups with which to consult. These include its Citizen's Panel, Youth Parliament, BME Focus Group and the Older People's Parliament. Analysis of needs covering all communities and services and other intelligence is routinely gathered at service level and co-ordinated through the research and review team. The new draft community plan will bring together a wider set of needs data for each priority area than the previous version. A recent stakeholder survey concluded that Medway's priorities and plans balance the needs of all sections of the community better than the average council.
- 43** The Council has clear plans to deliver strategic objectives. Examples include the Local Transport Plan that clearly describes transport needs and the Older People Plan that is based on the government publication 'Opportunity Age' and links plans for older people's services to national and local objectives. The Council also has ambitious plans and targets for waste minimisation and the Supporting People strategy has clearly laid out priorities with a risk assessment that identifies key barriers for delivery. These plans help the Council focus on strategic objectives and enhance the chances of successful delivery.

- 44** The Council's planning and budgeting cycles are aligned. The medium term financial strategy focuses resources on priority areas by prioritising opportunities for growth to reflect corporate priorities. Examples include a corporate restructuring to identify £2 million to strengthen children's services, investment in the contact centre and local service points and tackling shortcomings in affordable housing provision by creating a dedicated team. Short term spending priorities in service budgets reflect the annual customer survey and have resulted in investment in recycling, the park ranger service and more litter enforcement officers.

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

- 45 The Council is performing well in this area. Managerial leadership is strong and political leadership is effective although there is a clear weakness children's social care. Scrutiny committees contribute to policy development through cross party task groups and strategic capacity has recently been strengthened by a corporate restructuring. Financial management in the Council is strong and the Council performs well in securing value for money. It is building internal capacity by developing the skills of councillors and staff and good use of ICT and procurement. It supplements its internal capacity by working well with partners and has an excellent track record in attracting external funding.
- 46 The Chief Executive and senior managers provide strong leadership. The Chief Executive is well respected by councillors, staff and partner organisations. Staff consider themselves to be well led and valued. This demonstrates good managerial leadership.
- 47 Political leadership is generally effective. The Leader has been influential in a number of areas. These include working with SEEDA to obtain funding for regeneration projects, securing agreement to site a renal vascular unit at Medway hospital and representing community views to protect an environmentally important site at Cliffe Marshes from development. With the exception of children's social care Cabinet members provide clear direction to strategic managers through weekly meetings at which future plans and performance are discussed. Councillors sit on programme boards for major initiatives such as regeneration and 'Customer First'. These measures ensure that all councillors are engaged and are actively involved in policy formulation and performance review.
- 48 Scrutiny is adequate and improving. Each scrutiny committee sets its own annual work programme which includes contributing to policy development, monitoring performance and examining the activities of Cabinet. Portfolio holders are routinely required to appear before scrutiny committees to present progress reports and to answer questions and 'call in' procedures can be invoked if necessary. Scrutiny is particularly effective when working through cross party task groups formed to examine policy initiatives. The majority of recommendations from these groups are endorsed by Cabinet and incorporated in Council policies.
- 49 The Council's Standards Board is working well and has an appropriate profile. It has an independent chairman and a majority of independent members. It has developed and published protocols and codes of conduct in areas such as Licensing and Planning. The code of conduct is clearly linked to key legislation underpinning ethical practice.

- 50** The Council's uses partnership working to supplement its own capacity. Examples include working with government agencies and the private and voluntary sectors to deliver economic and social regeneration. Benefits to the Council include government funding of the Medway Renaissance Team under the terms of a unique agreement and an independent trust operating the Sunlight Centre, a multi agency healthy living centre in a ward with poor health indicators that won an award for Best Practice for Urban Regeneration in the UK 2004. The Council also engages well with statutory partners notably in community safety and health where there are many examples of good partnership working including shared use of the Rainham local contact point with the police and joint funding of the Director of Public Health and the Health Promotion Team. However there is scope to further develop the LSP and to foster a closer working relationship with some groups in the voluntary sector.
- 51** The Council manages its finances well. It has one of the lowest council tax levels for a unitary council. Its medium-term financial strategy, budgets and capital programme are soundly based and designed to deliver its strategic priorities and it manages performance against budgets well. It is delivering value for money on the majority of its services, with low and average comparative costs and average or high performance. Overall the Council was judged to be 'performing well' in the recent Use of Resources assessment.
- 52** Strategic capacity has been strengthened through the recent restructuring. A single Children's Directorate is aimed at securing a co-ordinated approach to children's services. The restructure also included the creation of a corporate projects team, a centralised management information function, a service improvement team and central management of the Customer First initiative and contact centre. This means the Council is well placed to deliver its forward agenda.
- 53** The Council has a strong track record with partners in attracting external funding. It has attracted £120 million of Sustainable Communities funding for regeneration and been awarded £30 million of PFI credits by ODPM (now DCLG) and Department of Health to support work with its health partners. It has attracted £24 million over the past five years to support other priorities. It completed its first public service agreement last year and achieved over £4.5 million reward grant having achieved ten of its 11 targets. This means the public experience improved services and the Council is able to invest additional funds in further improvements.

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

- 54** Access to services for customers is good and well supported by information and communication technology (ICT). Use of the web site has doubled in the past two years and the Council has met the e-government target of 100 per cent of transactions being available in electronic form. It receives over 2,000 e-forms a month and users made 4,300 electronic payments in the past year. It has created a network of 25 ICT kiosks, notably in rural communities, through which the public can contact the Council, police and health services. The Council has also introduced public internet access in its libraries and offers text messaging contact for users. The new customer call centre and local contact points are supported by effective ICT systems and enhance the council's ability to provide services and information. The Council has also invested in an extensive CCTV system that links to the emergency services.
- 55** The Council has effective procurement practices. Its approach is described in the Corporate Procurement Strategy that conforms to the national guidelines. Implementation of the policies and practices described in the strategy is over-seen by a councillor who 'champions' procurement issues and a corporate procurement and contracts manager who co-ordinates procurement activity and advises departmental managers. The Council participates in joint buying consortiums and procurement decisions are based on a matrix of cost and performance factors. Users are involved in specification and quality control. Examples include joint commissioning with the PCT and Kent Community Housing Trust of services at a residential centre for people with mental health needs where service users and their families were actively involved in specifying the services to be provided. Other examples of user involvement include school meals, homecare and housing maintenance. The Council was the lead for the Kent Buying Consortium (KBC)'s mobile phone users and achieved a two-year saving of £98,658. It also secured annual savings of £138,000 on furniture and stationary through actively managing suppliers. It has developed some imaginative services that benefit service users and generate income. These include marketing CCTV coverage to schools, a community alarm system to local subscribers, supplying remote medical monitoring equipment on behalf of the PCT and a temporary staff agency for itself and other public sector organisations. These initiatives provide cost effective services for the Council and its partners.
- 56** The Council is building internal capacity by developing the skills of councillors and staff. It has a programme of development opportunities for councillors that include compulsory training for specific committees such as licensing and planning as well as developing more generic skills such as presentation techniques, speed reading and interviewing. It pursues an active programme of staff development and provides for up to five days training a year for each member of staff. It has recently invested in a management leadership programme that is integrated with the existing Personal Development Review (PDR) system. Other support mechanisms for managers include biannual manager conferences and lunchtime briefing sessions with the Chief Executive. Project management skills and processes are well developed and deliver effective project management. These measures provide opportunities for individuals to develop their skills to benefit themselves and the organisation.

- 57 Human Resource (HR) policies and processes are strong. Sickness rates are among the best 25 per cent of councils at 7.5 days a year, and the Council has ambitious plans to reduce this to six days. Turnover rates are average. The Council recognises that there are recruitment and retention issues in some key areas including children's social care and housing. It has taken steps to tackle this including overseas recruitment, 'golden hello' payments, and market premiums but in children's services too much reliance is currently being placed on too few people with the necessary skills and experience. The Council is developing a revised system of workforce planning to support managers in identifying forward staffing requirements for service plans. Workforce planning is undertaken jointly with health partners but not yet effectively with the police or the voluntary sector. The Council is therefore unable to ensure that it is maximising the impact of its partnerships through efficient recruitment.
- 58 The Council actively promotes diversity. The Chief Executive personally leads an equalities advisory group which brings together community representatives, councillors and managers to inform service development. The Council's workforce reflects the ethnic makeup of its communities and it is taking positive action to address an imbalance in staff from ethnic minorities in lower grades and part time posts. This includes providing supervisory training and secondment opportunities for workers from ethnic minorities. The Council has a Developing Managers Programme for ethnic minority and disabled staff which has had positive impact on participants' confidence and promotion. The Council also has established Black Workers and Disabled Workers forums and is among the best 25 per cent of councils in terms of employment of women and black and ethnic minority staff in senior positions,

Performance management

- 59 The Council's performance in this area is adequate. It has a comprehensive performance management framework but this is not yet consistently applied in all areas. Councillors and senior managers are effectively engaged and there are examples of service improvements achieved by the Council's performance culture. Processes to link resource management and performance management are at an early stage of development and risk management is not yet fully embedded across all services. The Council is keen to learn from other organisations and customer feedback and its 'core value' groups are effective at managing performance in cross cutting areas such as value for money, environment and equalities. The Council does not systematically review performance with partners in areas of joint interest.

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- 60** Councillors and managers are involved in monitoring performance. Cabinet and Scrutiny committees receive quarterly performance reports. Areas for attention are identified by a 'traffic light' colour coding system. Portfolio holders receive more detailed quarterly reports of performance in their specialist areas and have weekly meetings with senior officers to discuss performance and identify issues for attention. Senior managers scrutinise performance information at monthly directorate meetings. This information is also examined by CMT who have identified 32 critical success factors to enable them to focus on what is important. Much of this information is statistical and lacks qualitative measures particularly in children's social care. Despite this these processes help ensure councillors and managers monitor performance and know where improvement is needed.
- 61** The Council has a clear focus on improving poor performance and value for money. Through performance monitoring it identified poor performance in benefits administration, homelessness and housing management. In each case it took action which included setting improvement targets, stringent monitoring and reviewing work practices. As a result the time taken to process benefit claims has almost halved, new services have reduced homelessness and housing management has improved from being poor to being among the top performing councils. The Council also has a continuing programme of service reviews involving staff, users and other stakeholders. Recent examples where these have been used to secure improvement include homelessness and parks management. These measures help the Council secure continuous improvement.
- 62** Staff are involved in annual personal development reviews (PDRs) which are used to set and review targets and assess performance based on competency frameworks. Although there is an agreed competency framework for senior management there has been a delay in introducing a similar framework for other staff. This lack of a consistent approach and inconsistencies in service and business planning undermine the effectiveness of performance management.
- 63** Processes to link resource management and performance management are varied. Long term strategies such as the Drug and Alcohol treatment plan, Youth Justice Plan and the Community Safety plan do not include information about the resources necessary to deliver them. Annual service plans are aligned to budgets and the Council's medium term financial plan helps it focus resources on priority areas. However there is no systematic way to link the cost of actions with outcomes to secure a focus on value for money. The Council is addressing these shortcomings by improving strategic planning and performance monitoring systems. The absence of consistent links between resource and performance management means that the Council's focus on priorities is intuitive, not systematic.

- 64 Targets are not always SMART(Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced and Time-limited). The Council attempts to use targets to help define required performance levels and drive improvement. However there are many examples of plans which contain targets that are vague, lack defined timescales or milestones and are difficult to monitor. Examples include action plans linked to improving air quality and carbon emissions and business plans such as those for Development and Environment and Asset and Property Management. The lack of SMART targets inhibits the Council's ability to effectively manage performance.
- 65 Corporate risk management is not yet fully embedded across all directorates and services. The Council has recently (May 2006) approved a new risk management strategy to improve on the one currently in use. The Council's Risk Management Group has yet to identify mitigating factors for all the corporate risks identified and service departments are still working on the mitigation of risks identified through the service planning process. Also, the focus on risks is under developed in some areas of the Council. An example of this is emergency planning where the current draft of the Council's emergency plan, which is in use as an operational strategy until approved, is not based on formal risk assessments. This means that not all risks to which the Council is exposed are identified and managed.
- 66 The Council is receptive to learning from other organisations, staff and customers. The Council takes opportunities to learn from others by visiting councils such as Middlesbrough (measures to counter prostitution) - Suffolk (library services) and Leicester (indexing tool for childcare). The Council also benchmarks its services to compare costs and service quality. Staff are encouraged to identify improvement opportunities and are familiar with the Council's 'whistle blowing' process. The Council uses its customer complaints system to improve services and recently streamlined the system to make it more effective. The Chief Executive reviews a sample of complaints every six weeks to ensure that they are being dealt with correctly and that learning opportunities are identified. These measures help the Council learn and improve.
- 67 The Council does not systematically review performance with partners in areas of joint interest. There are some examples of joint performance monitoring such as community safety where the Council with its partners regularly reviews the statistical information available nationally. However this is not part of a systematic approach and the Council acknowledges that more work is needed to embed effective cross agency performance management.
- 68 The Council's 'core value' groups are effective at managing performance in cross cutting activities. It has three 'core value' groups which monitor activity in the cross cutting areas of value for money, environment and equalities. Each of these groups is chaired by a senior manager, for example the Chief Executive chairs the equalities group. Although each of these issues is mainstreamed through the way the Council operates on a day to day basis these groups exist to help provide direction, secure consistency and act as a focal point for improvement and are therefore an effective mechanism for monitoring and managing performance in these cross cutting areas.

What has been achieved?

- 69 Overall the Council's performance in achievement is adequate.
- 70 The Council and its partners share an ambition to create a city of learning, culture, tourism and enterprise for the Thames Gateway. Despite this achievement against priorities is inconsistent. There is strong performance in economic and social regeneration and some good work in developing safer and stronger communities and health. Services for older people are not effectively co-ordinated although there are some examples of innovation. However there are acknowledged shortcomings in children's social care, affordable housing and transport.
- 71 The Council has achieved much in promoting economic and social regeneration. It has been successful in attracting the universities of Kent, Greenwich and Canterbury Christchurch University to the area. It is also instrumental in attracting external investment and in formulating an ambitious development programme spanning the next 20 years. The Council is committed to ensuring that this economic regeneration is matched by social regeneration and to ensuring that existing residents benefit from growth. It has achieved much through its neighbourhood action plan in All Saints area where improved community facilities are matched by initiatives to improve employment prospects, health and quality of life of local residents.
- 72 The Council works well in partnership. The community safety partnership makes a positive contribution to developing safer and stronger communities with effective action against anti-social behaviour and improved road safety. In association with the PCT and voluntary sector the Council is also contributing to reducing smoking and obesity as well as improving public awareness of issues surrounding teenage pregnancy and sexual health. A joint inspection of health and social care services for older people in 2005 also acknowledged good partnership working.
- 73 The Council performs less well in providing children's social care, affordable housing and transport. The Council has yet to maximise the potential of working with developers to tackle an increasing shortfall in affordable housing. Similarly the current transport infrastructure is adequate but will require substantial improvement if it is to cope with the demands of future regeneration schemes. The Council recognises its shortcomings in both these important areas and is developing detailed plans to guide future improvement.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 74 The Council is performing exceptionally well in regeneration. It has secured public funding of over £120 million for a regeneration programme spanning 20 years. Working closely with SEEDA the Council has made significant progress towards promoting education and learning opportunities to improve employment prospects for local people. A notable success was in attracting the universities of Kent, Greenwich and Canterbury Christchurch University to the former Chatham dockyard site. More recently mid-Kent College have secured planning permission and funding to move to the site.
- 75 Other regeneration projects are at various stages of development. Contractors are working on the re-development of Rochester Riverside and on the national museums project at Chatham; land assembly is complete at Strood waterfront; funding secured for the Medway Innovation Centre and infrastructure improvements to facilitate development of Chatham town centre and strategic plans are being prepared to develop Medway Waterfront, Temple Marsh and Gillingham Town centre as well as eight cultural centres. These projects are expected to attract up to £1 billion of private investment.
- 76 The Council is delivering social regeneration in deprived areas. It worked with residents to produce neighbourhood action plans for the three most deprived parts of the area in All Saints, Twydall and Brook Lines. All Saints is the most advanced of these. Projects implemented include delivering employment outreach services and support and advice to lone parent families to tackle debt, low self esteem and improve employment prospects. Despite these improvements there are few recreational facilities for young people in the All Saints area. Overall the Council's social regeneration initiatives have improved the quality of life for residents.
- 77 The Council is improving its performance in delivering housing but is unlikely to meet rising demand for social housing. A housing market needs assessment in early 2005 identified a shortfall in affordable housing provision of 1,451 units per year to 2011, a total of 13,059 units. The Council has responded by creating a dedicated team to focus on affordable housing. This has led to some improvement with negotiations currently underway with developers which could contribute an additional 1,600 units of affordable housing. These figures exclude major regeneration sites, where detailed development briefs have yet to be developed for all sites. The Council is also reviewing its planning policies to maximise future potential although it is unclear what impact this will have. Consequently affordable housing provision is increasing but there is no clear plan to tackle the backlog in affordable housing or meet future need.

- 78 The Council protects the local environment well. It exceeded government recycling targets in 2005/06 (30 per cent) by 2 per cent⁴. It has also appointed park rangers to improve safety and maintenance standards in parks and has allocated £500,000 to supplement external funding of £650,000 to improve urban open space sites in Gillingham and at Ranscombe Park. The Council is also seeking funds through a 'Living Landmark' bid to restore the Great Lines City Park which it considers to be a unique historic landmark of local, national and international significance. This part of the area is to be the focus of a World Heritage Status bid in 2009.
- 79 The Council's approach to global sustainability issues is at an early stage. In May 2006 CMT approved a draft report about future joint work between the Council and the Carbon Trust. This report demonstrates a good understanding of the issues and a series of proposals which have yet to be developed into a detailed action plan. The Council's Sustainability Strategy is in draft.
- 80 The current transport infrastructure is adequate. The Council's transport Annual Performance Report was considered 'fair' by the government office for the south east (GOSE). The Council has worked with the local bus company to secure improvements including 61 new buses and some real time information systems. However the areas only 'park and ride' system is restricted to one day a week and there are few initiatives to promote walking and cycling. The Council has implemented a staff travel plan for its own staff and 34 schools have transport plans. However it has not assessed the impact of these and there has been little modal shift from private to public transport. Congestion continues to be a problem.
- 81 Plans to accommodate the transport needs of the Council's regeneration plans are at an early stage. In 2003 the Council received £1 million from ODPM (now DCLG) to fund independent research and to model and plan Medway's future transport needs. The findings from this study informed the Council's LTP which was submitted to GOSE in May 2006. GOSE have yet to determine future funding support for specific initiatives. Consequently it is unclear whether transport improvements will be commensurate with population and economic growth.

Safer and stronger communities

- 82 The Council has in place many effective initiatives to tackle and reduce criminal behaviour. Many of these are carried out in partnership with other agencies such as the police and voluntary organisations through the Council's community safety partnership. Important initiatives delivered include an effective 24-hour CCTV operation operated by the Council with the involvement of other partners notably the police and schools and the creation of a team of Community Safety Officers, who are accredited by Kent police, who patrol and respond to reports of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and other crimes. The partnership works well to promote public safety and to reduce the level of crime and the fear of crime in the area.

⁴ This is based on un-audited data provided by the Council.

- 83 The latest Home Office crime figures available show that the level of crime in Medway is below average and reducing, although the level of sexual offences and violent crimes is increasing more than is the case nationally.
- 84 The Council works effectively with partners to reduce ASB. It encourages reporting of ASB through publications such as 'Medway Matters' and gathers information and intelligence to support police activities through its CCTV operation, its call centre and contact points. Council Community Support Officers also visit people reporting ASB to provide advice and reassurance. The Council also co-operated with the fire and rescue service to reduce arson in residential areas by closing alleys where this occurred and reducing the build up of rubbish in alleyways and other areas. The Council has created a rapid response team to deal quickly with graffiti, fly tipping and abandoned vehicles and a recent anti litter campaign resulted in 500 fixed penalty notices and a significant reduction in street litter. In extreme cases the Council has also carried out evictions where continued ASB has occurred in its property. Enforcement activity by different council services is co-ordinated through the Corporate Enforcement Forum. These initiatives help secure a co-ordinated approach to managing ASB that has led fewer incidents of ASB.
- 85 The Council works effectively with the police, PCT, housing associations and voluntary bodies to reduce drug related crime. Specifically its CCTV operation and Community Safety Officers support the police to identify drug misuse on the street. Other initiatives include working with young people to provide one to one support, a 24-hour telephone support line, a needle exchange with local pharmacies, a drugs user group and outreach work for street based sex workers. Drugs education over and above that routinely provided in schools has been provided to 300 young people considered to be at risk. The effectiveness of the Councils DAT has been enhanced since it has formed part of the Community Safety Partnership. The retention rates of users in treatment are good at 78 per cent.
- 86 The Council is taking action to reduce alcohol related crime but is unable to assess the impact of its work in this area. It created an alcohol control zone in Rochester, supports the police by monitoring 'hot spots' with CCTV, introduced a Code of Conduct for councillors dealing with licensing applications and works with licensees to secure a responsible approach to managing licensed premises. The absence of detailed figures means that the Council is unable to monitor the impact of these initiatives.
- 87 The Council achieved its PSA1 target to reduce fatal and serious accidents. Working through the Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership it achieved reduced vehicle speeds at sites with a history of crashes. It has also implemented road safety initiatives at individual schools including 21 walking bus schemes and 34 school travel plans. As a result there has been a 53 per cent (national average 42 per cent) reduction in crashes and injuries since 2002. The Council won the 2004 Prince Michael International Safety Award for road safety.

- 88 The Council's Emergency Plan is not yet in place. It has recently been re-written to take account of changes required by the new Civil Contingencies Act. The new version is currently in draft form and the Council continues to work to the previous version produced prior to the new Act. This undermines the Council's ability to respond to civil emergencies in the way expected by the new legislation.
- 89 The Council promotes racial harmony, cultural diversity and active citizenship. It operates standing focus groups for groups such as black and ethnic minority residents, disabled people and older people. It also supports community groups such as the Medway Interfaith Forum and the Ethnic Minority Forum to deliver a programme of events to promote cultural understanding. Examples of events include Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration, Chinese New Year celebrations, Black History Month, an annual older person's festival and the Medway Samurai project to promote understanding of Japanese culture in primary schools. These events promote racial, faith and community cohesion.
- 90 Although the Council's direct funding of community and voluntary organisations is relatively low the Council's Corporate Bidding Group helps to facilitate and enable community and voluntary groups to identify sources of funding and a recent workshop attended by 49 community and voluntary organisations in Medway. This has helped to build capacity in the community and voluntary sector and so far no application for help, which fits with the Council's own priorities, has been turned down.

Healthier communities

- 91 The Council and its partners work well together to understand local health needs and promote public health. Since 2004 the Council and the PCT have jointly funded the post of Director of Public Health (DPH) and nine out of 16 staff employed in the Health Promotion Team. This collaboration resulted, in 2005, in the publication of the first annual public health report since 1991. This was informed by a health equity audit and a healthy lifestyle survey and set local health improvement priorities within the national context of 'Choosing Health'. The two organisations also work together through the Public Health Partnership Board and the Council's Director of Community Services is a member of the PCT Professional Executive Committee Board. These links help secure a co-ordinated approach to promoting public health in the area.

- 92 The Council and its partners have clear health improvement priorities reflecting national and local issues and are successfully targeting services in these areas. The DPH's report 'Choosing Health in Medway' identified teenage pregnancies, smoking, improving sexual health and reducing obesity as priorities for action. Achievements in each of these areas include the following.
- Teenage pregnancies - Teenage pregnancy work is co-ordinated by a multi agency Teenage Pregnancy Partnership board. A specialist worker has been recruited to support pregnant mothers and services for pregnant teenagers are provided using a 'one stop shop' approach. The 'Living Learning Loving programme' provides advice in schools with the highest teenage pregnancy rates. These initiatives contributed to an 11.9 per cent reduction in pregnancies in girls under age 18 between 1998 and 2004.
 - Smoking - Since April 2003, 2669 people have been helped to give up smoking. The Council links prevention services to social and health care services such as those for coronary heart disease. The healthy lifestyle survey indicated that of the 23 per cent of young people addicted to tobacco 84 per cent want to give up. Therefore future work will focus on this group.
 - Improving sexual health - A strategy developed in 2003 has led to ongoing work with health partners, including the integrated sexual health information service (ISIS). Other initiatives include working with the police to tackle street prostitution; publication of a young persons pocket guide to local sexual health services and a 'Safe Ride Home Scheme' over the four-week Christmas/New Year period in 2005/06 in which late night bus and taxi drivers distributed over 5,000 free condoms and information leaflets.
 - Obesity - Following consultation with residents and partners in 2005 the Council developed an obesity strategy. This describes milestones for local action in settings such as home, school, workplace and leisure as well as through community and faith groups and health services. Specific activities include a 'just for kids' fitness programme at Council leisure centres attended by over 200 youngsters aged eight to 18 and a weight reduction project involving weekly sessions with a specialist pharmacist.
- 93 The Council is encouraging local access to health advice. It operates five community centres in deprived parts of the area which are managed by the Council for use by public and voluntary organisations promoting health and well being. The Council also supported the creation of the independently run Sunlight Centre which offers effective local health advisory services. The Council and PCT are preparing a joint health promotion campaign to include making information about healthy living more widely available to the public.

- 94 The Council is tackling fuel poverty. In partnership with the Kent Energy Centre (part of a national network of advice centres) it provides services around fuel efficiency awareness, targeted on deprived areas and promotes the installation of central heating. It has financially assisted 250 properties in the All Saints area to improve fuel efficiency and works with the health promotion team to target the vulnerable through a Care and Repair Agency. It has also included articles about fuel poverty in newsletters. These initiatives are helping to improve the living conditions and health of vulnerable residents.
- 95 The Council and its partners offer services that are sensitive to the health needs of minority groups. They are currently working together on the Avance Project – (Access to Voluntary and Municipal Services by Ethnic Minorities) which is a European Union initiative to research discrimination faced by ethnic minorities as users of care services and to secure changes to services to meet the needs of these groups. In addition the 'Valuing Medway People Health Framework' helps people with disabilities live healthier lives and the care and repair agency employs a specialist worker to work with clients from BME communities. In contrast the Council and the PCT need to improve their understanding of the particular health needs of minority groups such as the high incidence of diabetes in the Asian community.

Older people

- 96 The Council's understanding of the needs and aspirations of local older people is limited. It decided to wait for the publication of the government paper 'Opportunity Age' in January 2006 to inform its strategy and consequently has only recently (May 2006) approved a draft Older Person's Strategy for consultation. The council has been awarded £30 million in private finance initiative (PFI) credits to re-engineer care services for older people. However this re-engineering is based on 'best practice' which may or may not reflect local view and there has been little consultation with local older people. Consequently action to meet the needs and aspirations of local older people is service specific and not effectively co-ordinated.
- 97 The Council and its partners consult with older people to identify service priorities. They support a range of community and voluntary groups including the Older Person's Parliament, Pensioners Forum, the Medway Older Persons Partnership, Age Concern and 'Cross Roads'. These groups are represented on LSP theme groups such as the Older Persons' Strategic Programme Board; the Patient and User Involvement Forum and the sustainable development group. The Council also operates a standing focus group of older people who influence policy development in activities such as community safety. Older people's groups are also invited to attend stakeholder workshops on strategies such as the Waterfront Renaissance Strategy, Community Plan review and the Local Development Framework.

- 98 The Council provides services to support older people to live independent lives in their own homes. Medway Helpline provides a personal community alarm service for people who may need to call for assistance. This service is supplemented by other remote monitoring systems including fire and intruder alarms, gas detectors, bogus caller alert systems and fall detectors which the Council makes available through a commercial partner and a 'tele-medicine' system provided in conjunction with the PCT that enables patients' heart rate and blood pressure to be monitored at home by the health services. The Council also targets initiatives to tackle fuel poverty at older people including efforts to deliver the Government's Warm Front initiative and participating in Kent Action to Save Heat.
- 99 Partnership working between the Council and the PCT is effective. Achievements include meeting the PSA target for reducing delayed discharges from hospital; a joint health and social services care facility; three new health centres offering social care and health services and an Active Life Programme at Strood Leisure Centre for people recovering from heart problems who are referred by GPs. These initiatives contributed to a joint inspection of health and social care services for older people in 2005 praising joint working.

Children and young people

- 100 The Council's overall performance in this area is adequate, with both strong features and significant weaknesses. Provision for early years education and day care and for education and training for 14-19 year olds are examples of significant strengths. Both are already good and continuing to improve and benefit from effective strategic planning and service delivery. Most weaknesses are in children's social care particularly around measures to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect.
- 101 Arrangements within the social care service to respond to referrals are confused, overly complex and poorly planned. Standards of social work practice and case recording are poor and management supervision is weak. Risk is frequently poorly assessed, decisions are delayed, communication with referrers is poor, and intervention is inadequate. Managers fail to manage workloads properly or to ensure that timely and decisive action is taken. Basic systems are not in place to accurately record and monitor progress. Decisions are too often taken in haste and with inadequate consideration of all the relevant factors and options. Policy and procedures are incomplete and outdated. The response to serious case reviews has been inadequate. A key issue yet to be properly addressed is the threshold for the involvement of the local authority's social care service. Corporate parenting arrangements have failed to identify and address weaknesses in provision for looked after children.

- 102** The health needs of children and young people to develop socially and emotionally are well supported. Effective steps are taken to seek young people's views and to involve them in service planning and review. Monitoring, challenge and support for schools is good. The local authority has a good understanding of standards in its schools and is effective both in identifying development priorities and providing appropriate support. Excellent progress has been made in reducing the levels of permanent exclusions. Provision for those educated otherwise than at school has a serious weakness in the failure to provide full-time provision for all those who could benefit. Provision for recreation and voluntary learning is adequate overall but the good provision in schools contrasts starkly with that elsewhere. In some local communities there is very little indeed for young people to do. The lack of recreational facilities does not help to minimise anti-social behaviour. However, agencies work well together to identify high risk localities and groups and develop targeted responses. Despite recent improvements more work remains to be done to ensure that the work of the youth offending team is of a consistently high quality.
- 103** There are sufficient strengths overall to judge the capacity to improve as adequate. Senior officers provide good leadership, although too much reliance is placed on too few people. Clear policies, procedures and protocols which might serve to guide others and ensure the delivery of necessary minimum standards are also lacking in some key service areas. Working relationships with partner agencies at the strategic level are good. Reasonable steps are taken to analyse local needs. Key ambitions are clearly stated. However, some services too often address needs on a crisis basis rather than as part of a well-thought through strategy. It is often unclear how Council activities and those of partner agencies, are intended to come together to deliver strategic priorities. Planning to deliver priorities is of variable quality and there is insufficient sharing of expertise.
- 104** Performance management is inadequate in this area. Too much reliance is placed on performance indicators. Too little is done to gain additional insights into outcomes for children and young people and to monitor the delivery of action plans. Elected members need further help fully to understand how they can play an effective part in delivering the new objectives for children's services.

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 Medway Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 2-12 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.