

Corporate Assessment Report

August 2006



Corporate Assessment

Isle of Wight 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 Overall, the Isle of Wight Council is performing adequately. Since its election in May 2005, the political leadership has taken a strong lead in driving change, both within the Council and with its external partners, particularly in the development of a Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the restructuring of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). It is showing drive and determination to raise the level of ambition for the island. This is against a history that is widely acknowledged as one of low aspiration.
- 6 There is broad agreement, with partners, on the ambitions and priorities for the island. The Council has placed great emphasis on raising the levels of educational attainment as a cornerstone. The need for change is acknowledged by partners but the pace of change is unsettling some, most evidently in the Council's links with the voluntary sector, where its forceful approach has strained relationships. The Council has some strategies and plans in place to enable the delivery of its priorities but not all are yet in place, for example in education.
- 7 The Council has undergone significant change in the last 12 months, with many councillors new to local government, and the loss of a number of senior officers, including the chief executive. A new chief executive has been appointed and further recruitment to senior posts is scheduled for the summer of 2006. There are weaknesses in the Council's strategic approach to managing risks, the planning and development of its human resources, and external communications. It has a good track record of financial management and is seeking to extend its financial capacity, for example through its bid for PFI funding to improve the highways infrastructure. But it has not determined how it will fund its ambitions over the longer term. Partnerships have been used to extend operational capacity, most notably recently with the health sector. It has been less effective at building partnerships with councils and organisations on the mainland, having traditionally had an insular approach. Its approach to managing performance has been inadequate and while it has invested significantly in this area it is too soon to see positive and consistent outcomes in all its services and in its partnerships.
- 8 The Council's approach to value for money is adequate. Information on short and long term costs is now being collected and services are required to provide evidence of cost comparisons. But while there is review and challenge of performance to achieve value for money in some areas, the practice is variable and a culture of seeking this in all aspects of the Council's operations is not fully in place, and procurement is not co-ordinated at a strategic level.
- 9 The Council is improving its approach to service users and diversity in its population. It has had a focus on improving access to services and while not achieving all planned outcomes it has made practical improvements, including the development of a customer contact centre, an easy to access website and has rationalised points of contact. It has made very good progress on the e-government agenda. It is improving its approach to customers and service users and improving access to services, and has recently introduced a co-ordinated approach to customer complaints.

But the use of service standards is variable as is communication with service users. Opportunities for consultation are frequent and the community is active in response.

- 10 The Council has made solid progress on equality issues. It has a comprehensive equality plan and has carried out training for councillors, officers and partners. It has achieved level two of the equality standard and is taking steps to achieve the highest level possible. It is exceeding the basic requirement to carry out impact assessments for race equality in all its services, extending this to cover all aspects of diversity.
- 11 The Council has sustained comparatively good performance across a range of services, the one major exception being in education, where educational attainment is inadequate. It has begun to focus on outcomes for its communities in a way that crosses traditional service boundaries. This is less evident for its work in sustainable communities, though performance in some areas, including protection of the environment, coastal management, and waste collection and disposal has been good. It has not provided sufficient affordable housing to meet demand though has made effective progress in tackling homelessness.
- 12 It has been successful at attracting inward investment and in some significant initiatives, such as Cowes waterfront. It has been reasonably effective in its work, with partners, on the safer communities agenda. It has had mixed success in reducing levels of crime but has worked well in terms of its approach to dealing with drug misuse and in its work with young people, and in working collaboratively with the police in terms of countering the fear of crime among the vulnerable, particularly the young and old. Its work with health partners has been improving, with some good joint initiatives, again with schools, on healthy eating and physical activity, and it is beginning to deal with health inequalities, though this needs further targeted effort. It provides good quality services for older people, much of it in collaboration with NHS and voluntary sector partners, though its approach tends to be traditionally based around health and social care.
- 13 The Council has embarked on a journey of improvement and is putting effort and determination into making the appropriate changes in its corporate centre and services, which are designed to improve its performance and deliver better outcomes for the community. This corporate assessment has been undertaken in the early stages of this journey and in some cases it is too soon to see positive outcomes. Further strengthening of its capacity and the full establishment of a performance management culture will be essential in sustaining the Council's ambitions.

Areas for improvement

- 14 The Council needs to raise the levels of educational attainment, and should finalise its Children and Young People's plan, to include clear and resourced delivery plans.
- 15 The Council needs to improve the supply of affordable housing through the completion of a fit for purpose housing strategy and in collaboration with its partners.
- 16 To ensure the delivery of its agenda and to strengthen its performance the Council needs to reconcile its plans with its resources and strengthen its strategies and internal capacity in respect of:
 - human resource planning and workforce development; and
 - project and programme management capacity where clear responsibility should be identified in order to provide a focus and drive as well as expertise.
- 17 The Council needs to strengthen its approach to performance management fixing it into the culture of the organisation and extending this to the management of partnerships.
- 18 The Council needs to improve its relationship with the voluntary sector, where it needs to adapt its approach to fully utilise the capacity that exists.
- 19 The Council should strengthen its approach to external communication, to help build understanding of what the Council, and partners, are doing, and to build consensus and support for initiatives.

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	2
	Performance management	1
What has been achieved?	Achievement	2
Overall corporate assessment score**		2
*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** The Isle of Wight is a predominantly rural island, about five miles from the south coast of England. There are frequent ferry and hovercraft services between the island and the mainland, and Cowes, Ryde and Fishbourne are the principal ports of entry, linked with Southampton, Portsmouth and Lymington respectively. Newport is the administrative centre of the island, and the hub of internal communications. The Isle of Wight has an attractive coastline and much of the island has UK and European landscape designations, including Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, heritage coastline and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The island attracts over three million visitors a year, and the coastal towns of Ryde, Sandown, Shanklin, Ventnor and Freshwater are the main tourist resorts.
- 21** The island covers 145 square miles and has a population of 138,000, more than half of whom live in the three main towns of Newport, Cowes and Ryde. The demographic profile is heavily skewed towards the older age groups. A high proportion of the population are of pensionable age (26 per cent compared with 19 per cent for the South East region). The island has a significantly smaller proportion of young people aged 20 to 29 than Hampshire and England as a whole. Levels of educational attainment have been low. There is no higher education on the island, and many young people who leave to study on the mainland do not return. The ethnic minority population is small, at 1.3 per cent.
- 22** The island's population increased by 12 per cent between 1981 and 2001 largely due to a net inward migration, particularly of people of older working age and their children, together with those around retirement age. The population is expected to exceed 160,000 by 2020 (ONS 2003-based population projections), a growth of almost 15 per cent, significantly faster than that projected for England and the South East. Within these figures, the 0-19 and 20-64 age groups are expected to show a slight decline, while those over 65 will grow from 22 per cent of the total population to 28 per cent by 2020.
- 23** The economy is dominated by service industries, with the public sector, retailing and tourism as the main sources of employment. There is also significant activity in construction and engineering sectors, although financial and business services are, by contrast, relatively underrepresented. Although the island has enjoyed above average economic growth in recent years, and has attracted some high tech industries, it is significantly less prosperous than most of the South East of England. Average earnings are a third lower than the regional averages, and unemployment is 2 per cent, compared with the regional average of 1.4 per cent. House prices are high, especially relative to average income. Tourism remains an important source of employment but is highly seasonal, and characterised by low wages.

- 24 The island has areas of relative deprivation. Of the island's 48 wards, 15 are among the most deprived 20 per cent nationally and 2 are among the most deprived 10 per cent. Though in terms of the indices of deprivation the island ranks as the 126th least deprived local authority area in England out of 354), nine per cent of population are living in the most deprived super output areas in the country, and 22 per cent of children live in low income families. The South East England Economic Development Agency (SEEDA) has designated the island a Priority Area for Economic Regeneration.
- 25 Because of the rural nature of the island, and the limited public transport system, the population is very reliant on cars for transport, and car ownership is comparatively high. However, the majority of the island's road network is in a very poor condition, which has an adverse impact on congestion, service accessibility, economic activity and the environment.

The Council

- 26 The Isle of Wight Council was the first unitary council to be formed after the review of local government in 1995. The elections in May 2005 saw a change in political administration, from a coalition of Liberal Democrats and Independents to a Conservative group. The Conservatives hold 36 seats, Liberal Democrats 5, Independents and others 5 and Labour 2. The Council follows a Leader and Cabinet system of governance, with an overview and scrutiny committee chaired by a member of the Labour group. The cabinet consists of six portfolio holders covering the four main directorates and the council's finance and resource management. Four Policy Commissions assist portfolio holders and cabinet in the development of policy. Many of the majority group were elected for the first time in May 2005.
- 27 The Council officer structure currently comprises a Chief Executive and a Corporate Management Team of four strategic directors responsible for each of the four outward looking corporate objectives; however, this is subject to change. At the time of this inspection the Chief Executive post was being covered on an 'acting up' basis. An external candidate was appointed during the course of the inspection. The Director of Children's Services post is filled by an interim appointment, recruited in December 2005. This is part of a development and support package provided by consultants engaged by the Council to improve standards across the children's service following the retirements of the two substantive post holders. The Director of Adult Social Services post is also held on an interim basis by an external appointee. The incoming chief executive is currently developing proposals for the senior management structure.
- 28 The Council employs 4,200 (full time equivalent) staff. Its net revenue budget for 2006/07 is £178.8 million, and the capital budget is £42.1 million. Council tax in band D is in a range of £1,277-£1,304 depending on the parish precept.

- 29 During 2005 and early 2006, significant changes in the governance and partnership arrangements on the island have occurred, in which the new administration has played a prominent role. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is being restructured, and a Local Area Agreement (LAA) has been developed.
- 30 In June 2005 the island was selected as a second wave pilot to produce a Local Area Agreement (LAA). The Council, with its partners on the LSP, has developed its LAA with four main blocks-children and young people, healthy communities, safer and stronger communities, and economic development and regeneration. These blocks contain 17 strategic outcomes, supported by 38 goals and 95 specific targets for its three-year period. It includes the 11 targets for the island's second Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA2). Full delivery of the stretch targets would result in approximately £4.2 million of reward money. The agreement was signed by all parties in March 2006.
- 31 The LSP - Island Futures - was established in 2002 and produced its first community strategy in that year. The partnership reviewed its plans and activities in 2005. As part of this review, it identified the need for a longer term strategic vision and this led, in June 2005 to the adoption of a new '2020 Vision' for the island. This is the framework that has been used to develop a revised community strategy in 2006.
- 32 The restructuring of the LSP is expected to be completed and ratified in June 2006. It has an independent Chair and Vice Chair. Proposed governance arrangements comprise a Strategic Governance Board, responsible for developing the strategic direction of the partnership, and a Public Service Board, responsible for ensuring delivery of the community strategy and LAA. Four theme groups will cover: Safer and Stronger Communities; Healthy Communities; Skilled and Educated Communities; and Thriving Communities. The groups are responsible for ensuring that the views of the community of interest are taken account of, as well as carrying out specific pieces of work when tasked to do so.
- 33 The Council has been working with the health organisations on the island to take advantage of reforms in the health service, under the national initiative of 'Commissioning a Patient-led NHS'. The partners have been developing proposals to have a fully integrated health and social care service on the island. At the time of writing this report, the shape of the local health service had been confirmed by the Secretary of State as one PCT combining commissioning and acute care.

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

Ambition

- 34 The Council is performing well in this area. Ambitions are clearly articulated, challenging and strongly expressed. There is broad support for these based on a shared understanding of the needs and challenges facing the island. It has engaged partners and stakeholders in developing these ambitions. The Council has shown strong community leadership in its approach to building new governance structures and is building the capacity and performance management to enable it and partners to deliver its ambitions. Its approach to social inclusion is adequate but improving. Relations with partners are generally good and improving though strained with the voluntary sector at a strategic level. But its approach to external communications is inadequate.
- 35 The Council, with partners and stakeholders, has developed a clear and challenging set of ambitions for itself and the island communities. The recently revised Community Strategy looks at the period to 2020, while the Local Area Agreement, and Aim High, the Council's new corporate plan, cover the period from April 2006 to March 2009. These three documents were developed in parallel over the last 12 months and share four common themes: improving health and well-being; creating safer and stronger communities; improving outcomes for children and young people, and sustainable regeneration and development. Of these themes, the Council has placed the highest priority on improving educational attainment on the island. The overriding aim is best summarised by the vision set out in the Council's corporate plan, of 'A progressive island built on economic success, high standards and aspirations, and a better quality of life for all'.
- 36 The Council is building capacity, internally and with partners, to enable the delivery of its ambitions. It is investing in new performance management systems, internally and with partners, though from a low base. It has engaged well with other agencies, notably the NHS on the island, though historically, less so with neighbouring councils on the mainland. The LAA provides a framework for the performance management of the partnership. Strategies and delivery mechanisms are in place for some but not all, of its objectives. The Island Plan provides a good framework for long term development and the new Local Transport Plan addresses issues in a holistic way. But its draft Children and Young people's Plan, though acknowledged as ambitious, does not have clear delivery plans and there are gaps in strategic and service capacity. Clear plans and good performance management are essential in enabling the achievement of objectives.

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- 37** Communications are effective within the Council, but less so externally. The Council has effectively communicated its ambitions to councillors and officers and there is a sense of purpose and enthusiasm about their achievement. Though partners and stakeholders are generally aware of the broad thrust of the Council's ambitions and proposals, external communications are ineffective, not proactive or frequent enough. Good communication with the community is necessary for building consensus and understanding, particularly at a time of rapid change.
- 38** The Council has a good understanding of the problems and opportunities facing the island and an appreciation of the social and political context in which it operates. The collection and sharing of data with partners is effective in some significant, though not all, cases. The Council and NHS partners jointly resource an Island Research Group and this is assisting in planning future activity as well as enabling joint intervention, for example around delayed transfers of care from hospital. The Crime and Disorder Partnership has used intelligence effectively on a number of targeted initiatives. Shared intelligence on economic activity is underpinning the development of a new economic strategy. But data sharing in children's services is not as effective and impacts negatively on the ability to drive improvement.
- 39** The Council regularly consults with communities. Extensive consultation exercises and engagement in the LAA process and the development of the Island Plan has ensured a widespread understanding and shared perspective on local needs. The Council uses a variety of consultation mechanisms, including the citizens' panel, on-line activity, voluntary organisations and focus groups. It has established a network of 34 community partnerships across the island. It consults with hard-to-reach groups through activities such as 'Wight Insight'. Officers from culture and leisure services have worked with the Pan neighbourhood management group to address the needs of the local community. Consultation and user involvement has also influenced the work of the Adult and Community Learning service. The youth council is actively involved in debate on policy issues and influenced the Council decisions on its transport policy for young people in education. Outcomes from consultation have improved provision for leisure and learning, informed the preventative strategy and strengthened support for some vulnerable groups.
- 40** The Council's approach to the social inclusion agenda is adequate overall, and improving. It is not fully systemised through the Council, though there are pockets of good practice, notably in its cultural and leisure services. The Council broadly understands the meaning of social inclusion and exclusion and has taken steps to improve the way it considers the needs of the disadvantaged. For example, the proposal for the integration of health and social care is predicated on local delivery and to reach vulnerable groups. Service specific equality impact assessments are increasingly carried out, and the Council is one of only three unitary councils in England to have achieved 100 per cent of the duty to promote race equality in 2004/05. It has also put in place arrangements for consulting with BME communities and faith groups. Arrangements for liaising with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community are less effective.

- 41 The Council actively promotes and champions the needs of the island and is showing bold community leadership. Political leadership is strong. The leader's style is robust and energetic and he is driving the changes that the Council is making to implement the Aim High agenda, challenging staff and partners. It has embraced the government agenda for devolved governance by an ambitious programme of 'emparishment'- establishing new parish and town councils in areas where they do not currently exist. The present administration has given a much sharper focus on raising the levels of aspiration since its election in May 2005. It has led on the proposals for the revised LSP, and the emerging Public Service Board. And it has promoted with NHS partners, proposals for an integrated health and social care service. High level strategies are clearly aligned. This is essential if concerted action by all partners is to be effective.
- 42 The Council has effective partnerships, particularly with public and commercial organisations, though less so with the voluntary sector at a strategic level. Close and productive relationships have been built with other public sector bodies, including the Isle of Wight College and the health community. Engagement of the commercial sector, particularly through the Economic Partnership and Chamber of Commerce has been effective. Relationships are improving with partners on the mainland, though from a relatively low base. A voluntary sector compact is in place, but relations with voluntary organisations, while good at an operational level, are not constructive at the strategic level. Though broadly sharing the Council's ambitions, concerns over funding and a lack of recognition of the structures and ethos of the voluntary sector, and its role in the LSP, have strained relationships. This could threaten the productive partnerships that are essential in delivering the shared ambitions for the island and its communities.

Prioritisation

- 43 Prioritisation is adequate. The Council has clear priorities, which are understood by all key stakeholders, based on local needs and aligned with the community strategy and national policies. It is also developing a systematic approach to prioritising improvement initiatives, and allocating resources to these. However, the planning framework needed to support the delivery of corporate priorities is not yet complete. Some key strategies are out-of-date or in process of development, and there are weaknesses in action planning. The medium term financial plan does not take full account of the costs of some strategies.
- 44 The Council has clear priorities, which are closely aligned with local needs. Its five priorities, as set out in the corporate plan for 2006-2009, 'Aim High' are:
- drive the sustainable regeneration of the island;
 - improve the health and well-being of island communities;
 - create safer and stronger communities;
 - improve outcomes for children and young people; and
 - high-performing, cost-effective council.

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There is a clear need for regeneration, given the decline in manufacturing, tourism and agriculture on the island, and wages that are significantly below regional averages. The priority given to health and well-being reflects the fast growth in numbers of retired people and some significant health inequalities. Although the island is relatively safe and crime-free, there is a significant fear of crime, and the creation of safer and more inclusive communities is a particular need in deprived neighbourhoods. Improved outcomes for children and young people are critical to the future of the island, against the background of attainment levels at GCSE and Key Stage 2 that are below national averages. Improvements in service quality and cost-efficiency will support the delivery of all the Council's ambitions.

- 45 The Council's priorities are linked to its overall vision and ambitions, and are clearly understood by partners, residents and other stakeholders. These priorities were derived from the administration's election manifesto and from the '2020' vision for the island that the Council and its partners adopted as the strategic framework for developing a new community strategy. The '2020' vision was developed from consultation exercises and workshops held with partners and residents to identify the island's major needs, including the needs of BME groups and disadvantaged groups. The development of the Council's planning and budgetary processes has also helped to ensure that councillors and staff have a good understanding of its priorities.
- 46 The Council's priorities are aligned with the new community strategy and with the LAA. Priorities and initiatives in the corporate plan are linked with those in the community strategy. They are also linked with initiatives and targets that the Council and its partners have agreed in contracting the LAA with the Government. The Council's priorities are, therefore, aligned both with strategic objectives agreed with local partners and with policy themes set nationally for local government. This alignment has also helped to ensure that partners and other external stakeholders have a good understanding of the Council's priorities.
- 47 The Council does not have all the strategies in place needed to achieve its priorities. It has a wide range of strategic plans in place and is developing others in support of its priorities, but several of these are not complete. The Council has agreed a programme with the Government Office of the South East (GOSE) for moving to the local development framework (LDF) that will set out land use policies in support of the sustainable regeneration of the island, the draft core strategy for which is scheduled for approval in 2007. It recently published a draft strategy for children and young people. The new Local Transport Plan (LTP) is more explicitly linked to the Council's vision and priorities than is the predecessor plan. However, some key strategies are out-of-date or still in process of development - for example, the housing strategy and the economic strategy. In consequence, the Council does not have fully-developed policies and programmes for achieving some major corporate objectives.
- 48 The Council has not yet developed fit for purpose action plans for some strategies. For example, the strategy for children and young people does not include an action plan setting out initiatives, lead responsibilities, resource requirements and the contributions expected from partner organisations.

Furthermore, the Council has not collected baseline data for many of the performance targets in the corporate strategy and other strategies, for inclusion in action plans. Without comprehensive action plans for some key strategies, the Council does not have the basis for the detailed operational implementation of these strategies. Without baseline data for some performance targets, the Council does not have the means of measuring its progress against key objectives.

- 49 The Council has linked its priorities to the medium term financial plan (MTFP) but the MTFP does not take full account of the costs of some strategies. The MTFP includes projected costs for planned initiatives under each of the five corporate priorities, for the four years 2006/07 to 2009/10. But the Council cannot demonstrate that the MTFP takes account of the costs of all the initiatives that are needed to deliver its strategies - for example, in relation to the strategy for children and young people and the LTP. Because the links between key strategies and the MTFP are not complete, the Council does not yet have a fully robust planning framework for the delivery of its priorities.
- 50 The Council has linked service planning with the delivery of corporate priorities. Each service produces an annual rolling three-year plan that shows the actions it will take to achieve corporate priorities, how related risks will be controlled and the cost of these initiatives. In some services, service plans are linked to team plans and personal plans. The Council has made progress in linking service plans with corporate strategies, but this process is not yet fully embedded and the quality of service plans is variable. Services are taking initiatives to implement corporate priorities but the planning framework for co-ordinating and monitoring these initiatives is not yet complete.
- 51 The Council has some new organisational arrangements in place to support the delivery of its priorities, and these are proving effective. The new corporate governance groups - the Aim High Strategy Board and the Improvement Board - help to ensure that the Council maintains its focus on corporate priorities and the strategies and programmes for delivering these. The Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council chairs the Improvement Board and provides external challenge to the development and implementation of strategy. The Council has established teams of officers from relevant services - Corporate Objective Groups (COGS) - that are responsible for developing and implementing cross-council programmes relating to each of the five priorities. The COGS are proving effective mechanisms and have strengthened inter-service working, although there is still evidence of 'silo' working in some services. The Council is monitoring the implementation of service plans as part of quarterly performance management reporting. The Council and its partners are establishing a Public Service Board (PSB), which will include the chief executives of these bodies and will be directly accountable to the Island Strategic Partnership for the implementation of agreed priorities. The Council's corporate arrangements and the PSB provide sound frameworks for co-ordinating and monitoring the delivery of local priorities.

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- 52** The Council is developing a systematic approach to prioritising improvement initiatives, and allocating resources to these. As part of the budget-setting process, councillors reviewed the statutory background and strategic rationale for a wide range of services. In moderating service plans for the three years beginning 2006/07, officers and councillors used a matrix, with weighted scores, to prioritise proposed improvement initiatives and the allocation of financial and other resources to these. These exercises were the basis of a significant shift in resources in support of corporate priorities in 2006/07 - amounting to £11.7 million or 7 per cent of the net budget of £178.8 million. For example, the Council has used efficiency gains in central services and support services to help finance priority improvements in adult social services, housing and schools. Partners are also shifting resources into line with shared priorities - for example, SEEDA is joining with the Council to form an investment company that will provide funding for regeneration projects.
- 53** The Council is sustaining its focus on its corporate priorities and has demonstrated a clear willingness to taking robust action in support of these priorities. For example, the budget for 2006/07 includes efficiency savings of £6.6 million or 4 per cent of net expenditure, as part of the funding for the additional £11.7 million provided for priorities. The administration has demonstrated a clear willingness to make difficult decisions to deliver change - for example, the restructuring of the senior management team and the abolition of a number of posts. However, the Council has not resolved uncertainties about the future of some services - for example, the youth service. Strong political focus is helping to ensure that the Council makes the fundamental changes required by its corporate plan.

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

Capacity

- 54 Capacity is adequate. The Council is taking active steps to strengthen corporate capacity and has a proven record of increasing capacity through partnership working. However, there are weaknesses in the strategic approach to risk management, HR and procurement. The Council has a medium term financial plan and a good track record of financial management but has yet to reconcile how it will fund all of its ambitions over the longer term.
- 55 The Council has clear decision-making processes and well-developed policy-making capacity. Strong political leadership has helped to clarify the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers. Cabinet meetings are focused on strategic-decision-making and performance management, and there is effective delegation to Cabinet members. The Council has a fit for purpose forward plan and Cabinet papers and minutes are of good quality. Officers are clear about their responsibilities and operate within a scheme of delegated decision-making, set out in protocols that have recently been revised. The Commissions are politically proportionate committees, separate from Scrutiny, which publish well-researched 'blue papers' on issues linked to the Aim High agenda - for example, tourism - and make policy recommendations on these to Cabinet. The Commissions are new and to date, have been working through the administrations' manifesto commitments rather than on corporate priorities. They are an innovative development and provide the Council with considerable policy-making capacity.
- 56 The Scrutiny Committee has not been effective over the last year, although it has worked reasonably well in the past. Due to political disagreements about the arrangements for scrutiny, there have been three different chairmen of the Scrutiny Committee since the current administration took office in May 2005, and there have been no scrutiny reports. However, other committees - for example the Improvement Board and the Policy Commissions have provided challenge to some key aspects of Council policy and performance. The administration has recently appointed a well-regarded and experienced Labour councillor as chair of the Committee, with external co-opted members. Officer support is adequate and the committee has an agreed programme of work. A Policy Commission conducts health scrutiny and has made some progress with this. The Scrutiny Committee has not driven improvement over the last year but, following recent changes, is now positioned to do so.

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- 57** Councillor training is good and the Council promotes and maintains high ethical standards. Councillors underwent a comprehensive induction programme following the elections in May 2005, and the Council is implementing the IDeA member development charter and introducing personal development plans for councillors. All Cabinet members have IDeA mentors and most have completed the Leadership Academy programme. The Standards Committee has a majority of independent members and takes a proactive approach to developing and applying national standards, both in relation to the Council and to bodies with which the Council has partnership or contractual relationships. The monitoring officer works closely with town and parish councils to promote codes of practice. Councillor training and the promotion of ethical standards help to ensure that the Council's political management arrangements operate effectively.
- 58** The Council is investing in a new management team. It has recently appointed a new chief executive from another council and is changing the structure of its senior management team in order to align this with the programmes that it has developed for achieving its corporate objectives. It intends to make appointments to the new director posts and their direct reports over the next five months. High profile campaigns for the chief executive and director posts and very competitive salaries are indicative of the Council's commitment to strengthening senior management capacity.
- 59** Operational and strategic risk management is underdeveloped. Risk management is overseen by a cross-service officer group, and is based on a monthly 'risk status report', which records and evaluates risks and shows progress in the implementation of control measures. However, there are significant weaknesses in the management of strategic risks. The Council has not identified or agreed a list of key strategic risks or taken active measures to manage these. For example, the Council has not addressed the key risks and interdependencies arising from all the major projects that is undertaking or developed a change management programme as a means of managing these risks. In addition, the risk status report shows that the Council has not implemented full control measures for all recorded operational risks. Weaknesses in strategic and operational risk management mean that the Council cannot be sure that it has the capacity to achieve all its key objectives.
- 60** The Council has arrangements in place for achieving value for money (VFM) but these are underdeveloped. The Council collects and monitors some corporate information on costs and VFM. It has also to date achieved efficiency savings above the Government's targets. However, it has not embedded a strong VFM culture across the organisation. Some services routinely use unit cost and benchmarking data to review and challenge of value for money - for example, the library service - but many services do not. The Council has not yet developed the systematic arrangements needed significantly to improve VFM.

- 61 The Council does not take a strategic approach to HR. It has implemented several effective HR policies, including initiatives to address key staff shortages, improvements in staff communications, a middle management leadership programme, and staff training programmes, and steps to promote workforce diversity. It has also provided staff with opportunities to prove their abilities at director and head of service level, as part of management restructuring. Staff morale is in general positive, although some staff are apprehensive about the possibility of further organisational change. Sickness levels have not increased, despite a year of rapid change. However, the lack of a fully developed HR strategy and workforce development plan means that the Council is not taking a systematic approach to aligning HR resources with the delivery of corporate priorities.
- 62 The Council is not taking a strategic approach to procurement. There are pockets of good procurement practice within the Council - for example, school capital projects. However, the Council has not developed a strategy for implementing best procurement policy and practice throughout the organisation, as set out in the National Procurement Strategy for Local Government. Central resources for providing specialist procurement advice and developing corporate procurement standards are limited. The Council is not realising some potential cost savings and quality improvements because it is not taking a fully strategic approach to procurement.
- 63 The Council has active partnerships across the public, private and voluntary sectors. It has long-standing, productive partnerships with private sector bodies in waste management, personal care services and school building programmes and recently recruited external consultants and an interim director to fill short-term gaps in management capacity in the Children's Services directorate. It delivers integrated health and social care services by sharing financial and staff resources with the NHS, and is planning further integration of these services through Section 31 agreements, with the longer-term option of establishing a care trust. It has been successful in attracting external funding with partners, particularly for regeneration projects. The Council works with, and supports a wide range of voluntary sector bodies, although some of these relationships are under strain. Partnership working with geographically neighbouring councils (namely Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council, Hampshire County Council and district councils in Hampshire) is underdeveloped. There is scope for greater collaboration with these councils – for example, through shared services and joint procurement. The Council has mapped its partnerships, to the extent that it is aware of all of these and the purposes for which they were established. However, it has yet systematically to assess the performance of these partnerships, in order to determine if each partnership is delivering the outcomes which it was intended to deliver, and is cost-effective. Partnership working enhances corporate capacity, but the Council has not realised the full potential of some relationships.

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- 64 The Council is seeking to extend financial capacity but has yet to reconcile its funding requirements with all its ambitions over the longer term. It is developing an ambitious and large scale PFI bid for a major programme of highways improvement, amounting to some £800 million. It has a good record for budgetary control and has developed a medium term financial plan (MTFP) which is broadly aligned with corporate priorities. The MTFP was approved this May and is predicated on delivering the Council's Aim High agenda within council tax increases of no more than inflation. It involves efficiency savings of £6.6 million in 2006/07, to help fund resources of £11.4 million allocated to priorities, and additional cumulative savings of £13.6 million in the following three years. This requires cashable savings each year more than three times the Government's annual target of 2.5 per cent. However, the Council has not yet developed detailed plans for realising these ambitious savings targets. Furthermore, the MTFP does not provide some of the funding that will be required to deliver some strategies in full - in particular those for children's services and transport.
- 65 The Council makes effective use of IT resources. It has secured a wide range of operational efficiencies and service improvements from its investment in IT. Recent developments have included the customer relationship management system, which currently handle over 50 per cent of service calls, automated payments for services and online systems for development and building control. The Council met all its e-government targets for 2005 and its website has been assessed as among the best on the country. The Council is implementing the IDeA marketplace as its e-procurement system. The Council's IT systems provide a sound framework for the realisation of service improvements and cost efficiencies.
- 66 The Council does not have an up to date asset management plan. The Strategic Asset Management Panel, a small group of key councillors and officers, is responsible for the strategic management of the Councils' fixed assets, which have a value of about £300 million, and advises the Cabinet on investments and disposals. The Panel is currently developing asset plans in support of the Council's five priority outcomes but these are not yet complete. The Council is working in partnership with other public service bodies on the island to identify opportunities for combining property assets. This includes a proposal to establish an 'island investment company' with SEEDA and other public sector partners, which will help to secure resources for the Cowes Waterfront Initiative and other regeneration projects, including private sector resources. The lack of an asset management plan means that the Council is not maximising the potential contribution of its fixed asset holdings to the Aim High agenda.
- 67 The Council is considering some radical changes to the ways in which it operates, as a means of improving customer access and cost efficiency. A feasibility study by external consultants indicates that the Council could improve customer service and achieve cost savings of £7.9 million over ten years by reorganising the call centre, creating shared business administration teams and improving support services, such as HR and procurement. However, these proposals are subject to key dependencies, such as the PFI project, and also involve resource issues and risks that the Council has not yet evaluated in full.

Performance management

- 68 The Council is performing inadequately in this area. Progress in achieving a performance-driven culture, with a focus on managing performance rather than monitoring it, has been slow. Ownership and widespread understanding of performance management is not yet embedded within directorates, with variable and inconsistent application in practice. Service standards are not fully developed and vary in quality. The monitoring and management of partnerships is underdeveloped. However, this judgement reflects past performance and the position at the time of the inspection rather than the changes that are now being made. In recent months, the Council has invested significantly and appropriately in improving its corporate performance management processes, ground is being made up and arrangements are developing. Greater use is being made of learning from other organisations and learning has begun to be shared in a more structured way. But much is new and it is too early to see positive outcomes at this stage.
- 69 Commitment to performance management is high and the picture is improving. The Council has invested time and resources over the last 12 months, with the restructuring of the corporate centre and the appointment of programme leads, an improved framework, and a new performance management database (CorVu) to track corporate and departmental performance. The Council is also making sure that all service plans and individual appraisals meet the corporate standard. Progress is steady in establishing corporate performance management as a routine activity.
- 70 Corporate monitoring is becoming more effective and performance management processes are becoming established. The Aim High strategy group consisting of cabinet members and senior officers is developing into an effective weekly forum for the assessment of the Council's achievements against its strategic goals. The Priority Improvement Area (PIA) system identifies and targets under-performing areas of the Council, although with very mixed success-for example the limited progress made in improving educational outcomes. There are some positive examples of performance monitoring leading to service improvement though these are not universal. Monitoring has led to intervention to correct underperformance in the planning service, the benefits service and the fire and rescue service. Reporting on performance information is developing with quarterly reports to Cabinet and CMT. There is guidance and training for councillors and the Council is aware of where it stands in terms of PIs.
- 71 However, the Council does not yet have a performance-driven culture and managers vary in their ability to set stretching but achievable targets. Often targets are framed around inputs or outputs rather than the difference the service aims to make for its users. Not all managers take effective corrective action when going off-target. Performance reporting, action planning and progress monitoring processes are variable and inconsistent. Some departments are good, but in others it depends on individual manager's ability. This inconsistency is a symptom of inadequate overall quality assurance on the performance management process in the past.

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Ownership and a wider understanding of performance management practices and processes are not sufficiently embedded within the directorates. There are few examples of joint monitoring or arrangements to secure accountability with partners. Evaluating processes, costs and outcomes jointly is underdeveloped.

- 72 Greater use is being made of learning from other organisations and learning has begun to be shared in a more structured way. The Council is keen to learn and improve. It is using external promptings and direction effectively, although self-analysis and review remains limited. Recently councillors and officers have been more willing to visit other councils to look at good practice. The cross-departmental working groups (the COGs) are ensuring that learning is shared in a more structured way across the organisation. Comparative information is used to compare performance against other local authorities, although there is scope for making greater use of this. The Council is gradually using learning from other organisations and shared learning to drive improvement.
- 73 The Council is strengthening some important aspects of performance management. It is introducing performance appraisal for directors and councillors and there are regular meetings between directors and some portfolio-holders to discuss and account for service performance. Officers are becoming clearer about what is expected of them and what the key priorities of the Council are, but the Council still has some way to go. The personal development and management review (PDMR) process is carried out annually, but has tended to focus on meeting training and development needs rather than performance.
- 74 There are some strong high level planning frameworks in place - the Council's corporate plan and the community strategy - but there are inconsistencies and variability in the quality of the performance monitoring and control at the directorate level. The connections between corporate planning, service planning and finance are improving from a low base but they are not fully integrated. Service planning guidelines are in place but not yet achieving consistent, resource-linked operational plans. In many cases action plans lack clear, quantified outcomes and milestones. The Council has recently introduced quality checks on service plans within departments, to ensure consistency in format and that the appropriate linkages with the high-level plans are in place.
- 75 Service standards are not fully developed, vary in quality and are not consistently monitored or communicated to service users. The Council is developing a corporate approach to monitoring complaints, recently establishing a corporate complaints unit and complaints officers in each directorate. However, the Council's current systems for using complaints and user feedback to deliver improvement vary and a culture of valuing complaints is not yet evident. The lack of standards and the failure to use service feedback or complaints limits the Council's ability to determine whether it is meeting its intentions, its users' expectations or to drive improvement.

What has been achieved?

- 76** The Council's overall performance in achieving outcomes against the shared priorities is adequate. The Council has a good understanding of local needs and its five corporate priorities are well-aligned with national priorities and those shared with partners. It is undertaking a wide range of initiatives in support of these corporate priorities, but cannot demonstrate a strategic approach to some issues or clear outcomes.
- 77** The Council has a mixed record of achievement in relation to the sustainable regeneration and development of the island. It has been effective in promoting economic development, and in maintaining the quality of the environment. It is also active in its support for public and integrated transport. However, there is a shortage of affordable housing, and the island's roads are in a poor condition. The Council and its partners have not taken a fully integrated approach to the sustainable regeneration of the island, reflecting the lack of an overarching strategic framework for this.
- 78** The Council has responded well to the public health agenda. Close partnership working with the NHS has resulted in the integration of a range of health and social care services. The Council has also made progress in reducing health inequalities, although it does not have a strategy for this, and has been active in promoting healthy lifestyles. Positive outcomes from these health programmes include a reduction in smoking and in teenage pregnancies.
- 79** The Council works effectively with partners to build safer and stronger communities. Volume crime is below average for the family group and reducing faster than average, although violence is high and increasing. There have been successful initiatives to reduce drugs use and the abuse of alcohol. Emergency arrangements are fit for purpose and the command system is clear.
- 80** Outcomes for children and young people in the Isle of Wight are generally adequate or better. But levels of educational attainment are inadequate despite good standards being achieved up until the age of seven years. Although strongly committed to raising standards, the Council has not yet implemented an effective strategy for achieving this or engaged schools sufficiently. Although Key Stage 2 results have improved, only 44 per cent of pupils gain 5 or more GCSEs graded A* to C, compared with the average for England of 54 per cent.
- 81** The Council provides a range of services for older people, notably with health and voluntary sector organisations, but it does not yet have an approach that goes much beyond traditional health and social care fields.
- 82** The Council has made some progress towards its objective of being a high performing, cost effective council, but there is scope for improvement. With the exception of education, service performance is comparatively good - 58 per cent of the Council's PIs were above average in 2004/05, and 67 per cent of PIs showed an improving trend.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 83 Until recently, the Council's approach to sustainable communities and transport has been driven mainly by service-level initiatives, rather than by co-ordinated corporate programmes. However, the Council is starting to take a more structured approach, with services linking initiatives to corporate priorities and taking account of interactions with each other's areas. The Council and its partners have lacked an overarching strategic framework for the sustainable development of the island and some key strategies have been lacking. However the emerging LDF and the new community strategy are promoting a greater understanding of the benefits of a more co-ordinated approach.
- 84 The Council has been effective in promoting economic development and regeneration. The Council and partners have won regeneration funding for the island and used this for some successful projects - for example, Lottery funding for the Quay Arts Centre in Newport and SRB funding for the regeneration of the Ryde transport interchange and related environmental and town centre projects in Ryde. The Council, SEEDA and other partners have spent £15 million on site assembly for the regeneration of East Cowes town centre, in preparation for a scheme that will involve a mixed use development of businesses, housing, and community facilities. The Council provided 'pump priming' funding for the development of a modern business park in Newport, which has attracted some modern manufacturing companies, with well-paid jobs, and provides incubator units for start-up companies. The Council also supports a range of development initiatives for rural businesses. Development initiatives by the Council and partners have contributed to strong economic growth on the island, which has averaged 4.5 per cent in recent years, compared with 2.9 per cent for the South East.
- 85 There are some weaknesses in economic development. The Council has not taken a strategic approach to the development of tourism on the island in the past. However, it adopted a Tourist Development Plan in October 2005, in conjunction with partners, and the Policy Commission has recently published a Blue Paper with proposals for the implementation of this plan. The Development Plan and the Blue Paper provide a strategic framework for the future development of tourism. Educational attainment and skill levels remain low and a barrier to developing some sectors of economic activity. The Council has not fully explored some of the approaches that could help to remedy these problems, such as links with universities on the mainland and closer working with partners across the Solent. As a result, average earnings and productivity on the island remain well below those for the South East as a whole.
- 86 The Council and its RSL partners are not taking a co-ordinated strategic approach to the delivery of affordable housing. The Council has generally good relationships with local RSLs but these operate on ad hoc basis, without a strong, shared vision or co-ordinating strategy. The Council's Housing Strategy 2004 - 2009 is already out-of-date and does not provide an effective framework for affordable housing. Against this background, only 220 affordable dwellings were built on the island between 1999 and 2005. However, the Council recognises the importance of affordable housing and is taking measures to increase supply.

Its new supplementary guidance has raised the target contribution of affordable housing from new developments from 20 per cent to 30 per cent. It is commissioning a housing market assessment as part of its LDF preparations. It is providing its own land to help build 240 new affordable housing units as part of a large housing development at Pan, which is one of the island's most deprived areas. It has also undertaken some successful community initiatives under the related neighbourhood management programme in Pan, for which the Government is providing funding of £2.5 million. The Council has also provided additional capital funding of £2.2 million for affordable housing across the island. It is starting work on a new housing strategy, which should help to provide the co-ordinated approach to affordable housing and other housing issues that it currently lacks. The Council and its RSL partners have not delivered enough affordable housing to meet local needs, but the Council has begun to address this issue.

- 87 The Council has made good progress in reducing homelessness and the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, through arrangements with the private rented sector and other initiatives.
- 88 The Council exercises good stewardship over the island's environment through its planning policies, its leading work on coastal protection, landslide risk management and climate change, and use of its own rural assets. It recognises that the high quality of the environment is a key economic 'selling point' for the island and has this as a strategic corporate policy driver. However, the Council's planning policies and regeneration strategies have meant that development has been focused mainly on towns and settlements in the east. For example, the current regeneration programmes are centred on Cowes, the Medina Valley and Ryde. This urban focus has contributed to the difficulties experienced by some rural communities in accessing jobs and services, and to their relative isolation.
- 89 The Council has been very successful in minimising and recycling waste. Its PFI contract for waste collection, recycling and disposal operations has received national recognition and the Council is short-listed for beacon status in this field. The Council has exceeded national targets for recycling, is in the top quartile for waste management and diverts 55 per cent of domestic waste from landfill.
- 90 The Council has had some success in increasing the use of public transport. The Council has taken measures in support of integrated transport - some in the face of opposition - such as the redevelopment of the Ryde interchange, park and ride schemes and a £50 all-island parking permit for residents. It has introduced a flat bus fare of 50p for young people (14 -19) in full time education, and free bus fares for people aged over 60 throughout the day, which exceeds mandatory requirements. The latest information from Southern Vectis, the Island's bus company, shows that bus journeys increased year-on-year by 12 per cent in April. These increases were more marked for the over 60s, where they were 85 per cent in April. However the Ryde interchange is still under construction and the all-island parking permit was introduced this spring, and so their impact cannot yet be assessed. Non-subsidised bus fares are expensive, and services operate mainly in the main towns in the east. The Council has not fully aligned its support for bus services with social and community needs.

Access to employment and services remains difficult for some groups reliant on public transport. The Local Transport Plan 2006 (LTP2) takes a wider view of transport issues than the previous plan and GOSE's initial responses to it have been favourable.

- 91 The Council is developing a strategic approach to dealing with the poor condition of the island's roads and the related problem of traffic congestion. It has been preparing a major PFI bid for highway maintenance and improvement for a period of over two years. There have been delays in submitting an expression of interest - due to changes in Government timetables, outside the Council's control - but this is due for initial submission to Government later in 2006. The principle of this PFI bid is widely supported within the Council and by stakeholders. The implementation of a road programme on this scale should remove a major barrier to economic growth and help to relieve some significant traffic congestion and environmental problems.

Safer and stronger communities

- 92 The Council is prioritising its work to promote safer communities and deal with crime and the fear of crime. It has formed a Safer Communities Directorate to reflect the priority given to this topic. It has had mixed success in crime reduction but has been effective at working with young people and in its work to reduce and prevent misuse of alcohol and drugs. Community safety issues are in all reports to councillors for decision but not yet in service plans. The Council and its partners have good intelligence about levels of crime. It has an effective community safety partnership with active engagement of councillors and officers and commitment from the partners. The partnership has had internal difficulties in the past but has worked effectively to deal with these. The partnership commissioned a thorough audit and consultation prior to its current Crime and Drug strategy involving over 4000 people, but the strategy itself lacks clear objectives and targets, except as it relates to young people.
- 93 Progress on crime reduction has been mixed. Of the key offences collated for comparison purposes, performance is better than average in three, and below average in three. Compared with other authorities in the Home Office defined family group, volume crime is below average and reducing faster than average, but violence is high and increasing. There has been a good rate of reduction on already low levels of acquisitive crime. The number of burglaries from dwellings fell by 50 per cent in the 2004/04 to 2004/05 and the detection rate rose from 53 to 58 per cent. Robbery and thefts of motor vehicles have also been reducing at better than average rates. But violence against the person and sexual offences have increased faster than national averages. The rate of increase in recorded violence, while above the national and family average, was much lower than in 2003/04. Theft from motor vehicles has reduced, but at a rate lower than the national average.

- 94 Resources have been directed to address the fear of crime. Over £140,000 was allocated in the budget for 2006/07 to fund police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and accredited Community Support Officers. In total, external funding has been secured for thirty nine PCSOs. The Home Office is providing 75 per cent of this funding for an indefinite period and the Council 25 per cent. This will provide the island with PCSO policing at a significantly higher level than is the case for most other areas. A communications post is shared with the police and this assists with specific campaigns and the general promotion of information to the community on crime related issues. Effective action is undertaken by the partners to reduce the fear of crime by regular presentations and explanations of policing policy to a variety of groups.
- 95 The Council has effective information sharing protocols with the police to enable targeting of activity. This has helped deliver 18 Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), supported by 15 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts. In 2005/06 four crime reduction and environmental weeks were held, based on crime statistics, delivering community education and dealing with a number of issues including trading standards, and licensing as well as police and probation matters. Agencies work well together to identify and target children and young people at risk of anti-social behaviour. This includes support for families and individual young people, including the most vulnerable.
- 96 Work to reduce the impact of drug and alcohol misuse has been effective.. The Lighthouse Project has reduced burglaries on the island due to successful treatment of dealers; and the Council's rent deposit scheme to address the housing needs of substance mis-users are examples of effective interventions. By December 2005, 50 per cent of identified problematic drug users had been attracted into treatment, and overall, the Council has a good performance for users participating in drug treatment programmes. A Young People's Substance Misuse Service ('Get Sorted') has been established to deliver programmes of information and education. Action has also been taken against alcohol abuse, via a multi-agency campaign in 2005 and visits to licensed premises. In this exercise, 143 alcohol related offences were detected and eight premises failed the test purchase exercise. The island's first designated alcohol free zone has been established in an area of Newport.
- 97 The Council works effectively with partners in the island and across Hampshire to plan for emergencies. Staff have been trained, and exercises carried out to test plans. Action to encourage business continuity planning within the council and by business and voluntary organisations is under way. Emergency arrangements are fit for purpose and the command system is clear within the appropriate documentation. The Council is implementing the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act.
- 98 Work to co-ordinate injury prevention is in its early stages. The safer communities partnership now oversees the Injury Prevention Forum - accountable to the partnership for reducing accidents of all types and implementing an action plan. Performance measures for the range of initiatives currently undertaken are still under development.

Education initiatives have been undertaken with a range of middle and primary schools discussing risk and accident prevention, with over 3,000 pupils attending. The Fire and rescue service carries out targeted checks on vulnerable households to minimise fire risk. A Lifeline scheme is in operation on the island with some 3,000 customers. This helps provide reassurance for vulnerable older people.

- 99 Serious road accidents on the island are below the median for comparable councils. But the Council is in the worst quartile for performance in reducing accidents.
- 100 The Council has high ambitions for building stronger communities and in particular for its programme of empowering local decision-making at parish level. The Council and its partners have arrangements in place for consultation and engagement of communities and it does this in a variety of ways, though consultation is not consistently used to shape services. The Council has a growing awareness of diversity issues and has established a sound base for further improvement. It is delivering on its responsibilities under race equality and disability legislation. Through activities such as support to island carnivals it has worked to promote and recognise cultural diversity. It has targeted programmes in its work on cultural and leisure services. The neighbourhood learning programme in Ventnor has been developed in partnership with the community and work in the Pan neighbourhood pathfinder has led to defining the family learning service delivery plan on the estate for a three-year period. The service has also worked effectively with Parkhurst and Camp Hill prisons on work to inform vulnerable families of the potential risks of crime.
- 101 It has engagement with the voluntary sector and aspirations to extend its capacity but this is not matched in practice. The Council has a compact for partnership working with the voluntary and community sector to which the Isle of Wight health trust is a signatory. As noted earlier, the Council makes extensive use of the sector in the health and social care field, and relationships are good at operational level. But funding for voluntary organisations is on an annual basis and there is uncertainty about future funding levels that is causing uncertainty among voluntary sector groups.

Healthier communities

- 102 The Council has responded well to the public health agenda. The Council and its partners have a growing awareness of the picture of health and inequalities across the island though not yet a comprehensive approach to targeting activities and resources. Improvements have been made in some areas of activity through effective inter agency working, particularly in schools and with vulnerable groups, the Council has a broad awareness of the links between its work in this area and across the safer communities theme.

- 103** The LAA has a strong health component, 'healthy communities' being one of the four blocks in the agreement and health issues run through the other three blocks. Responsibility for the delivery of this lies with the Healthy Communities Partnership, one of the four theme groups of the Island Strategic Partnership. Relationships with the health organisations on the island are positive and there are good links between the Director of Public Health and various Council departments on matters such as healthy eating in schools, oral health, and exercise. Health partners recognise the Council as being willing to talk and engage on common issues. There is good joint working in some areas, such as occupational therapy, where the partners have recently signed a Section 31 Agreement, and in children's services and mental health.
- 104** The Council has improved its joint working with the health community. It has worked with the PCT and Healthcare Trust on proposals to integrate health and social care on the island, recognising the potential created by the reform of the health service under the 'Commissioning a Patient-led NHS' programme. It has jointly funded a number of posts within the Public Health team, including public health intelligence; Agenda 21 issues- addressing links between the environment, sustainability and health; two linked posts dealing with teenage pregnancy; and a joint post co-ordinating physical activity programmes. Though not a jointly funded post, the Director of Public Health was a joint appointment between the Council and its health partners. The Council has provided £50,000 in the 2005/06 financial year for patient transport to mainland hospitals for cancer and renal care.
- 105** The Council has made some progress in addressing health inequalities for some groups, but does not yet have an overall strategy for co-ordinating and targeting its activities in this area. This is to be produced later in 2006. Mapping of health inequalities to enable a focus of activity is not yet comprehensive, though the Public Health report 2005 (published in March 2006), prepared by the Director of Public Health, now provides a detailed picture of the health of the island analysed on a geographical basis. This includes an analysis of the average life expectancy by ward. This shows that there is a difference of 8.2 years between the ward with the shortest life expectancy and that with the longest. Outcomes on addressing these differences are not yet apparent. The JAR identified a range of community based services in both urban and rural settings that delivered to all groups including the hard-to-reach and vulnerable. There is a developing strategy of providing families with access to a wide range of multi disciplinary services, and health professionals play a key part in services provided through the children's centres and the SureStart project.
- 106** Some progress has been made on dealing with the housing conditions of the most vulnerable. The Council has worked with the Director of Public Health on the promotion of the Warm Front initiative and has carried out a health equity audit of healthcare services for homeless people in March 2006. The Council has good intelligence on the incidence of fuel poverty on the island. Historically, action to tackle fuel poverty has been focused on promotion of the government's warm front grant. With partners in the voluntary sector the Council was successful in accessing the highest number of grants per head in the south east.

Between April 2004 and the end of March 2005, 537 properties had energy efficiency measures fitted. Activity now is targeted in Housing Improvement Zones, where housing conditions are below average, beginning in 2005/06 with the Ryde warmer homes project. With its partners, and under the aegis of the Island Warm Homes group, the Council has a fuel poverty action plan that aims to reduce the number of households in fuel poverty to less than 5 per cent of the total by April 2008.

- 107 The Council and its partners have been active in promoting healthy lifestyles for young people. The Healthy Schools programme has achieved a 78 per cent participation rate and is driving a range of health related projects in schools, leisure facilities and summer activity schemes. The Public Health team is working with the Healthy Schools lead officer to promote and implement a smoke free school site policy. From September 2007 all schools must have a smoke free school site policy to attain Healthy School status. Two education sites, Ryde High school and the Isle of Wight College, have smoking cessation sessions, facilitated by the Stop Smoking Service. The Council's sports development service has introduced new activities in Pan following a specific event aimed at improving levels of physical activity. Work is also underway to tackle obesity in schools through the Healthy eating Alliance.
- 108 Positive outcomes have been achieved in some areas of targeted activity to tackle local priorities. Between 2003 and 2005 the Stop Smoking Service met its targets to help people stop smoking for four weeks. Teenage conceptions dropped in 2003 and 2004 with the overall rate falling 21 per cent since 1998 and exceeded its 2004 target reduction on the 1998 baseline. The Pan Neighbourhood Pathfinder is tackling health inequalities and developing accessible models of support such as pub-based health advice sessions and a community slimming group. The SHIELD project is a joint programme linked into the Learning disabilities team.

Older people

- 109 The Council engages with older people in a variety of ways, although with a focus on health and social care. Consultation mechanisms include an older person's forum and surveys commissioned from voluntary sector bodies, with the results of exercises fed back into service development. The Council and the NHS consulted widely with older people and user and representative groups in developing a joint commissioning strategy for older people's services. But the Council has not carried out systematic research into the aspirations and needs of older people in areas other than social care and health, for the purpose of strategic service development. The Cabinet member for Care, Health and Housing is the older person's champion and has been active in feeding back their concerns to the Council. The Council supports intergenerational activities, such as the oral history project. It also provides comprehensive information on the services available to older people, on its website and in a booklet. Engaging with older people has helped the council to develop and improve services for them, although mainly in respect of health and social care.

- 110** The Council works closely with the NHS and voluntary and independent sector bodies to provide integrated health and social care services to older people. It is a leading member of the Older People's Strategic Partnership Board, which co-ordinates and oversees these services. The Council and the NHS jointly commission a wide range of services for older people, including nursing care, intermediate care, occupational therapy, a falls service, the supply of community equipment, and the development of a single assessment process. Most of these services are provided by joint teams of Council and NHS staff, working at the acute trust, in intermediate care teams and in GP surgeries, with strong voluntary sector involvement. This partnership approach has resulted in some very positive service outcomes - for example, delayed hospital discharges are among the lowest in the country and a joint initiative has reduced recorded falls of older people. The integration of health and social care services is improving the quality of older people's lives and supporting their independence.
- 111** The Council provides some good services for older people in areas other than health and social care, but does not take a corporate approach to developing these. Cultural and Leisure Services provide a wide range of bespoke activities for older people. The Council provides free bus fares for people aged over 60 throughout the day, which exceeds mandatory requirements. The island was one of the first areas in the country to integrate visiting finance officers from the Department of Work and Pensions, Housing Benefits and Social Services, which is of considerable help to older people. The Council also actively promotes direct care payments to older people, which are in line with national targets. It supports, and works with voluntary sector bodies representing older people and providing services for them. It also collaborates with partners in joint initiatives to improve older people's lives - for example, a campaign to protect older people and initiatives to prevent accidents. A key theme of the new community strategy and LAA is helping older people live independent lives at home, by promoting benefits take-up and developing 'networks of support' to counteract social isolation and meet other needs. However, the Council does not have a strategy for developing older people's services beyond health and social care, and has not developed cross-service initiatives and projects for this age group. Moreover, the Housing Service has only recently begun to address the shortage of sheltered and special care housing for older people on the island. The Council provides some valuable services for older people in areas beyond health and social care, but service development is hindered by the lack of an overarching strategic approach.

Children and young people

- 112** Providing opportunities for all children and young people to achieve is a high priority of the Council. A change of political administration in May 2005 brought with it strong leadership, clarity of vision for all children on the island, well-articulated ambition and clear priorities. Close and continuing attention by the Council to ensure sufficiency and alignment of capacity and performance management should continue to ensure that ambition and priorities convert to delivery that positively impacts upon the quality of life and enhances the life chances for all children and young people.

Significant change has occurred at chief and senior officer level with the chief executive, director of children's services and other officers taking early retirement. There has been an inevitable impact upon the change process but the drive to increase capacity by strengthening the directorate and improving performance and service standards has begun, supported by a team of retained consultants. Work towards implementing the Children and Young People's Strategic Trust by October 2006 and the development of the Children and Young People's Plan has been significantly led by the interim director of children's services, involving key partners from the local authority, the police, the Learning and Skills council, Connexions, Strategic Health Authority, the Healthcare NHS Trust and representatives of the voluntary sector, and progress is evident, although there is much to do in a constrained timescale.

- 113** With the highly significant exception of major aspects of education, local services on the Isle of Wight are generally adequate and some are better and have had a positive and beneficial impact upon outcomes for children and young people. However, children and young people do not enjoy and achieve at school and standards are not good enough – issues that have driven and dominated the political and professional agendas since the change of administration. Although the management and capacity of the children's service are adequate, and the ambition of the council good, the timescale has been too short to enable the identification of broadly based evidence of sustainable change. Many of the building blocks of sustainability, such as capacity, linkage of budgetary allocation to service priorities, and performance management are in progress and, specifically in relation to education, the school improvement strategy is insufficiently robust to raise attainment and systems for monitoring and evaluating progress are absent.
- 114** The health community and its partners have combined to secure adequate health outcomes for children and young people with some examples of innovative practice leading to good outcomes. Health promotion, aspects of health education and health provision to all children (including children who are looked after by the council and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities) are generally good, although further examination is required of the role that Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services should fulfil.
- 115** On the basis of the evidence gathered during this joint area review, children and young people appear safe. Arrangements made by the Council are satisfactory and there are good examples of effective interagency work. However, until recently some child protection cases were unallocated and although contingency arrangements were in place, this constitutes an unacceptable risk to the children concerned. The Council and its partners are working well together to support young people most likely to offend and are working satisfactorily with those who have offended. Staff shortages contribute to the significant pressures that the children's social care service frequently experiences. There is insufficient attention to refocusing the children's service towards a model of early intervention and prevention that would reduce the reliance on high-cost services such as child protection and residential care, thereby alleviating some of the capacity pressures.

- 116** Children and young people including vulnerable groups are supported well in their personal, social and emotional development. The inspections of schools and the youth service have noted that children are helped to take responsibility and face challenges in their lives, and the work of the Youth Council has brought about significant changes for young people. Young people say that they feel safe, but more could be done to support young victims of crime and to learn from incidents of racism.
- 117** Participation in education after Year 11 is satisfactory overall and the number not in education, employment or training is below regional and national averages. However, success rates for those at the local college have continued to improve and are above national averages. The supply of adequate and affordable housing on the Isle of Wight is insufficient and affects all children and young people.

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 Isle of Wight 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.