

Corporate Assessment Report

October 2006



Corporate Assessment

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

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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 The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council provides good services that have a positive impact on local communities. The focus of the Council is on providing the best services it can with the resources that it has available. It has a short to medium term approach based on its analyses of needs in the communities it serves and on consultation it has carried out. However, its long term vision and associated ambitions for the Royal Borough are not explicit. There is not a clear statement of what the Council believes the Royal Borough should be like in ten years time, or how the well being of the people of the area will be improved through the actions it intends to take. The Council's ambitions are clearer for some specific areas of the Borough, such as Ellington. The Council is performing at an adequate level.
- 6 Community leadership is variable. Councillors engage well with their local communities and are effective advocates for the community at local and ward level. Similarly, councillors provide leadership over issues of common concern, such as successfully challenging proposals to increase night flying from Heathrow airport. However leadership is less effective at tackling difficult or complex issues including the need to determine clear long term ambitions for the borough.
- 7 The Council works effectively with partners on service provision. The local strategic partnership works on a consensual basis to improve services for local communities and the delivery of the Community Strategy is effectively supported by the Council's service planning. There is also good partnership working in important areas which is resulting in improvements for the local communities. For example, partnership working in community safety has led to some noticeable successes in some high profile areas, such as dealing with anti-social behaviour, which has contributed to a reduction in the fear of crime in the Royal Borough.
- 8 The Council's capacity is adequate. It is working to build capacity through its 'Delivering Excellence' programme. This programme encompasses every aspect of the Council's work and sets out to achieve modern, efficient services and to deliver budgetary savings. Capacity has been strengthened in important areas including, information and communication technology (ICT), risk management and procurement. The Council also supplements its internal capacity through effective partnership working at service level. Human resource policies have recently been reviewed and strengthened although the Council's has yet to tackle work force planning to address local recruitment difficulties in some areas.
- 9 The Council has yet to formulate specific plans to deal with the significant financial pressures it faces. These pressures are expected to intensify in the future and the Council cannot be sure that it will achieve sufficient savings to sustain current service levels in all areas. There is limited funding available for key corporate activities such as corporate planning, performance management and policy support for councillors.

- 10 Relationships between senior councillors and officers are good and lead members are well regarded. There is strong managerial leadership at the Council with an effective focus on service delivery. However there are shortcomings in the way that overview and scrutiny works.
- 11 The Council has yet to implement a consistent approach to diversity. It has developed a diversity strategy and both the Leader and the Chief Executive are diversity 'champions' for the Council. Some progress has been made towards recruiting employees from diverse backgrounds and the Council is working towards providing services that meet the needs of the whole community.
- 12 The cost of Council services is low when compared nationally and it is currently achieving good value for money. Attention is being given to services that are performing less well.
- 13 There has been good achievement against most of the shared priorities. This has included significant improvements in environmental issues and in particular recycling, noticeable success in reducing some areas of criminal activity, the fear of crime and attaining two stars for social services. While there are still areas where improvements need to be made, customer satisfaction levels are generally high and achievements are recognised by the community as improving the quality of life in the Royal Borough.

Areas for improvement

- 14 The Council should in association with partners develop and communicate to stakeholders an overarching strategic vision and a set of clear and challenging ambitions.
- 15 Based on the strategic vision and ambitions referred to above the Council should identify specific long, medium and short term priorities that are integrated into service plans and budgets and are supported by clear performance targets.
- 16 Councillors should take a stronger role in performance management at the corporate level. This will involve reviewing how Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee make use of performance information.
- 17 The Council should review the governance of partnerships to ensure that formal and statutory requirements are complied with and to integrate the requirements of the Human Rights Act, and anti-discrimination legislation into the councillors' code of conduct.
- 18 The Council should develop a more proactive medium term financial strategy that sets out how the finances of the Council will be put on a more sustainable footing.
- 19 The Council should apply corporate performance management more consistently across the organisation to drive improvement.

Summary of assessment scores

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

The locality

- 20 The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is one of six unitary authorities within Berkshire. It is a relatively small unitary authority with a population of 133,200 (Office for National Statistics 2001). The Royal Borough is in a strategic location in the 'silicon valley' along the M4, close to Heathrow airport and about twenty miles west of London. As a result of its location, it has attracted a number of headquarters (or European headquarters) of large Fortune 500 companies.
- 21 Although 83 per cent of the Royal Borough is designated Green Belt, it is relatively densely populated with 687 people per square kilometre compared to 424 for the South-East Region. Most people live in the two urban centres of Windsor and Maidenhead, with Maidenhead being twice the size of Windsor. There are 14 rural parishes, one of which includes Ascot, the Royal Borough's third town, and Eton Town Council, with similar status to a parish council.
- 22 The population is generally affluent, healthy and mobile. Fifty five per cent of households are employed in either the professional or managerial/technical social classes compared to 38 per cent in Great Britain. House prices within the Royal Borough are the highest outside Greater London with an average house price of £356,637 in 2005 – twice the national average.
- 23 The Royal Borough is ranked 326 out of 354 councils in England and Wales in terms of overall deprivation. It is therefore an affluent area. There are pockets of deprivation, but the general high standard of living can mask these. Unemployment is at 1.6 per cent, compared with 3.7 per cent nationally (March 2005).
- 24 Approximately 30,000 people commute into the Royal Borough and 28,000 commute out every day. The challenge is to ensure that suitably skilled local people, who can afford to live in the area, can fill local jobs.
- 25 The Royal Borough is a major visitor destination attracting some seven million visitors a year, generating spending of £360 million, and employing approximately 11,000 people. It has two of the top ten paid visitor attractions in the country - Windsor Castle and Legoland.
- 26 The proportion of people aged 65 years or over is below average for the country (15.2 per cent compared to 16 per cent nationally) and its proportion of over 85 years is slightly below the national average (1.85 per cent compared to 1.95 per cent nationally). These percentages are predicted to increase over the next five years with implications for health and social care. Approximately 20 per cent of the population is aged under 16, which is slightly above the national average (19.5 per cent).

- 27 People from black and minority groups comprise 7.6 per cent of the total population. About 4.6 per cent of the total population have Asian or Asian British ethnic minority backgrounds. There are well established Muslim and Sikh communities in Maidenhead.

The Council

- 28 The Council has 57 members. Since 2003 the Liberal Democrat group has been in control of the Council. Thirty four seats are held by the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives have 17 seats, Independents 4 and Ratepayers 2. The Leader and Cabinet model was adopted in May 2000.
- 29 There are eight Cabinet Members from the Liberal Democrat group. There is an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a Best Value and Performance Improvement Committee. Both Committees are chaired by members of the Liberal Democrat group. There are a range of policy panels that are made up of Members from all the political groups.
- 30 The management team consists of the Chief Executive and four Directors, Education, Social Care and Housing, Planning and Environment and Leisure, Cultural and Property Services. The Heads of Financial Services, Corporate Performance and Development, Human Resources, Legal Services, Democratic Services and Business Improvement all report direct to the Chief Executive. This structure has been in place for two years.
- 31 The Council is a member of the Community Partnership, the Royal Borough's local strategic partnership. The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat group is the chair of the partnership. This is a cohesive partnership that produced its first Community Strategy in March 2003 and is currently in the process of producing its second. There are six ambition groups. These cover the five themes in the Community Strategy; being safe and secure, a good place to live, work and visit, healthy and caring, getting about and learning for life. There is also an ambition group for the guiding principles that underpin these themes; working together, leaving no one behind, safeguarding the young and involving people.
- 32 In 2005/06 the Council has a net revenue budget of £139 million. The capital programme for 2004/05 to 2007/08 is £79.1 million. Balances at the beginning of 2005/06 were £4.6 million. In 2004/05 £216,000 of reserves were used to support the revenue budget. The council tax for a band D property is £912.46 (excluding parishes).

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

Ambition

- 33 The Council is performing adequately in this area.
- 34 The Council's long term strategic ambitions for the Royal Borough are not clear. The Borough Strategic Plan does not provide a clear strategic focus and it is difficult to identify a single set of challenging long term ambitions that are shared and understood with partner organisations. The Community Strategy has a high level vision statement for the Royal Borough. However, it is not translated into a specific view of what the Royal Borough will be like in ten or more years' time. The Council intends that the Local Development Framework and the new Community Strategy that are currently being developed will provide a more explicit longer term view for the area.
- 35 The quality of community leadership provided by the Council is variable. Councillors are actively engaged with the community on issues at a local and ward level and there are some examples of councillors taking a lead on issues of common concern which affect significant parts of the borough such as challenging proposed increases in the level of night flights into Heathrow airport. However, the Council does not adopt a strong proactive community leadership role at the borough level. An important outcome of the absence of effective community leadership at the borough level is the lack of clear and recognised long term ambitions for the Royal Borough.
- 36 The Council understands the overall context, within which it works, and draws this understanding from an evidence base of demographic and performance information developed and shared with its partners. The Council also offers strong support to the local strategic partnership in the use of Outcome Improvement Plans (OIPs) for each of the ambition groups. The OIPs are used on an annual basis to enable the partners to focus on key priorities and outcomes of real benefit to the residents of the Royal Borough, such as for vulnerable children.
- 37 The Council works well in many strategic partnerships to achieve shared service ambitions. Notable examples include work within the community safety partnership, and on healthier community initiatives where partners endorse the role the Council plays. In addition the Council is working with neighbouring boroughs on issues such as economic development and transport. As a consequence there is clear evidence of community benefit from effective partnership working.

- 38 The Council is very ambitious about the services it delivers. It has a Borough Strategic Plan that drives its own activity as a provider of services. The Borough Strategic Plan is a high level document which has to be read in the context of the Community Strategy. It sets out the Council's vision, values and broad priorities in a clear and accessible manner. These are based on stakeholder consultation both directly and indirectly where they are shared with those in the Community Strategy.
- 39 While there is general support for the Community Strategy, and some understanding by Council staff of the values outlined in the Borough Strategic Plan, neither document reflects ambitions for the Royal Borough that are unique or distinctive. There is an implicit understanding of ambitions for the Royal Borough among senior councillors, but it is not made explicit in the documents. This means that other councillors, partners and staff are not able to identify consistently the ambitions. The Council has also not been able to tackle some difficult strategic issues including a more proactive approach to income generation or had an impact on regional issues including traffic congestion which concerns both residents and the business community.
- 40 Both the Community Strategy and the Borough Strategic Plan set stretching and challenging ambitions for services. For example, ambitions to improve social services, the planning service, customer access and recycling are clear. Similarly plans to improve the housing options for frail and elderly people are ambitious and shared with Housing Association and Primary Care Trust partners. The Council is also working with major local employers as part of the development of the Local Development Framework to produce a vision for the economic future of the area. The key area of the competitive labour market is yet to be addressed.
- 41 The Community Strategy is supported by the Council's service plans, which also reflect both national and local priorities. Most of these plans directly relate to the Community Strategy, rather than the Borough Strategic Plan to set the planning context for service development. While this highlights effective integration of the Community Strategy and service planning it creates confusion about the role of the Borough Strategic Plan in expressing a strategic approach within the Council.
- 42 Residents are aware of the Community Partnership. The Council newspaper, 'Around the Royal Borough' is effectively distributed to all residents and together with strong community work by many of the councillors, contributes significantly to the understanding residents have of the work of the local strategic partnership and the Council's contribution to this (54 per cent of respondents agreed that Council and its partners provided effective leadership while only 7 per cent did not, Household Survey 2005).

Prioritisation

- 43 The Council is performing adequately in this area.
- 44 The Council is able to prioritise some key areas, in particular service issues, but does not focus effectively on strategic issues. In 2004 and 2005 the Council held consultation meetings with its partners to assess the current strategic context of the Royal Borough and to develop a shared understanding of what needs to be done to address those needs. A key part of this approach is the identification of priority outcomes. In practice these priorities focus mostly on service improvement and have enabled the Council to focus on key aspects of services that need to be improved. However, there is no explicit view of the long term priorities for the Royal Borough.
- 45 The Council has a clear priority to improving how the Council operates in delivering services. The broad modernising agenda: 'Delivering Excellence', contains priorities for improvement across a number of service areas including: human resources, financial planning, customer service centre and electronic service delivery. Meeting the targets for improvement it has set in these areas together with achieving excellent CPA status in three years will be challenging and provide a focus to drive change and secure service improvement.
- 46 The Council is effective at identifying and prioritising the service improvements it needs to make. It has developed a formal methodology for ranking services which it considers require overall improvement. The criterion for the ranking includes cost, performance and customer satisfaction. Having identified the priorities for improvement the Council uses project management techniques to make sure that the Service Improvement Plans are delivered. Planning Services and Highways and Engineering Services were identified as priorities for improvement under this methodology. As a direct result of its improvement plan there has been improved performance in the Planning Service.
- 47 The Council has not set out clearly its long term corporate priorities. The Borough Strategic Plan is structured around the strategic themes in the Community Strategy and describes four broad priority areas that are linked to thirteen inward looking priorities. However, there is no ranking of, or between, the corporate priorities in the Borough Strategic Plan. Consequently there is confusion among councillors, partners and staff about nature of the Council's strategic over-arching priorities. As a result most priorities are set within an individual service context making it difficult for the Council to focus its limited resources on cross-cutting issues.
- 48 There is an effective prioritisation model in use at a corporate level for evaluating new spending proposals exceeding £15,000. All such proposals are submitted in a prescribed format and are evaluated against criteria linked to the Borough Strategic Plan and corporate plans. They are then subject to a cost/benefit analysis before being examined by the Prioritisation sub-committee of Cabinet. The process is not yet applied to existing revenue budgets so its value is limited to the evaluation of new initiatives.

- 49** The Council's approach to aligning resources with priorities in the short term is adequate. There is some alignment of resource management with performance management, particularly in the outcome improvement plans but it is not possible to track this through a consistent and transparent process from corporate to service levels.
- 50** The Council has adequate processes in place to identify the needs of communities. For example, both Community Strategy Outcome Improvement Plans (2004/05 and 2005/06) include actions to identify the needs of the BME communities in the Royal Borough. The plan for 2005/06 also includes direct action to improve learning opportunities for adults in the Ellington area and this has had strong impact in improving opportunities for BME communities in the area which was recognised by OFSTED in its recent report on racial equality in education. However, the Council is still at the stage of identifying the needs of the BME communities across the Royal Borough.

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

Capacity

- 51 The Council's performance in this area is adequate.
- 52 The 'Delivering Excellence' Programme has provided the focus for real improvements in the Council's support services and the Council anticipates significant savings from future phases of the programme. Key areas, such as human resources policies, procurement, information and communications technology and risk management have been reviewed and reorganised to improve the Council's capacity. The most significant constraint on the Council's capacity is its financial position. Until this area is addressed effectively the Council cannot be sure that it can sustain improvements in service delivery or be able to increase substantially its limited corporate capacity. The focus on services constrains the development of the strategic capacity of the Council. There is limited funding available for key areas in the corporate centre that could help drive this development, such as corporate planning, performance management and policy support for councillors.
- 53 The Council has yet to formulate specific plans to deal with the significant financial pressures it faces. Changes to the local government financing regime will result in constrained increases in future revenue support grant. The annual revenue budget for 2005/06 highlights that the Council spends below the level that the government expects it to and it cannot raise significant additional revenue to meet current and future budget pressures because of council tax 'capping'. In the future spending pressures are expected to intensify as services respond to factors such as demographic changes and more stringent requirements in relation to waste management. The Council is responding by implementing a programme of efficiency savings based on service reviews, increased use of ICT and improved procurement. Despite this it remains unclear whether the Council's financial resources will be sufficient to meet future service needs.
- 54 The Council achieves value for money for the majority of its services. It is a low spending council and most service costs are below the average of comparable council. The Council systematically benchmarks service costs through an initiative which uses comparative data from CIPFA and the Audit Commission to assess its own services. Where costs and/or performance do not compare favourably the Council takes action to secure improvement through service reviews. As a result the Council has an effective mechanism to help it assess where it is and is not achieving value for money from its delivery of services.

- 55 The Council has yet to implement a strategic approach to diversity. Although progress has been made on embedding the approach within the organisation, the Council recognises that corporate capacity in this area is limited. The Council has a diversity strategy and is in the process of implementing the associated action plan. It has achieved level two of the Local Government Equalities Standard and performance indicators relating to the workforce indicate strong performance in recruiting employees from a diverse background. The Leader and the Chief Executive are the champions for diversity in the Council. However, the Council does not yet have a consistent and strategic approach to ensure it is meeting the needs of the whole community.
- 56 There is strong managerial leadership at the Council with an effective focus on service delivery. Managers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The structure of the organisation is service based. Policy development and implementation resources are limited. The outcome is an emphasis on service improvement and a limited capacity to deal with strategic issues.
- 57 Senior councillors provide adequate leadership. Cabinet councillors work closely with officers to monitor performance and secure service improvement. In addition Cabinet councillors have effectively co-ordinated the Council's reaction to external issues such as a proposed increase in night flying from Heathrow airport and the threat of local flooding.
- 58 The overview and scrutiny function is not fully effective. The Council recognises that there are shortcomings in the way that overview and scrutiny works. These include a reluctance to be proactive in commenting on policy formulation and a tendency to react to events rather than follow a structured work plan. In addition some councillors involved in scrutiny display a reluctance to ensure that the work of scrutiny has a positive impact on improving policy and service development. These shortcomings undermine the effectiveness of the scrutiny function.
- 59 The Council's approach to ethical governance is adequate. Relationships between lead councillors and officers are good. As in many councils, work has yet to start to ensure that the governance of partnerships complies with formal and statutory requirements and to integrate the requirements of the Human Rights Act, and anti-discrimination legislation into the members' code of conduct. The integration work is planned when the constitution is revised at the end of the year.
- 60 Partnerships are used effectively by the Council to increase its capacity. Partners in all sectors see the Council as supportive and keen to work with them on improving services. Partnerships in key areas, such as health and community safety have led to improvements in impacts in these areas that are set out in the Achievement section.

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- 61** The Council is improving its capacity through the use of flexible human resource (HR) policies. An example of this includes recruitment and retention of staff with flexible policies and the use of market supplements. This is a key area for the Council because of the competitive nature of the local labour market. As a result turnover rates have halved since 2000 and a notable area of success is that there are no vacancies for qualified social workers. However the Council has yet to develop work force planning arrangements and turnover remains high in comparison with national figures, whilst it is roughly in line with figures for the South East, at just under 16 per cent. There are shortages in areas, such as environmental health and trading standards that are having a direct impact on service provision.
- 62** Staff receive effective training and development. The Council has developed an approach to training which is needs led. This is achieved by the implementation of a corporate appraisal system which facilitates the development of individual training and development plans. Training is therefore targeted at improving the effectiveness of staff and developing workforce skills to meet future demands.
- 63** Risk is well managed within the Council. The Council has a strong and developing approach to risk management and its framework and processes have been accredited by the Association of Local Authority Risk Managers (ALARM). There is a comprehensive corporate risk register and service output and improvement plans together with all major projects are risk assessed. Not only does this provide a mechanism to assess risks associated with projects but has also informed the Council's decision making process. The Council is now developing a risk register for schools and as a consequence is ensuring that all areas of the Council are risk assessed.
- 64** The Council is performing well in procurement. A senior procurement officer has been in post for a year and introduced a 'mixed economy' approach that blends strategic thinking and support from the centre with the operational issues that are the responsibility of managers in the directorates. This has led to a coherent and comprehensive 'gateway' process to the renewal of major contracts in the Council. Major savings in the waste (£411,000) and school meals (£93,500) contracts have been achieved as a result of this process.
- 65** There has been substantial investment (nearly £9 million) in information and communication technology (ICT) in the last three years. This has facilitated the replacement of all the key systems in the Council, including finance, procurement and project management. This has increased the capacity of the Council, particularly through more effective procurement resulting in savings and better managed projects. In contrast progress towards enabling e-payments has been slow and this lack of transactional capability is likely to prevent the Council meeting government targets by December 2005.

Performance management

- 66 The Council's performance in this area is adequate.
- 67 The Council has been successful in driving up the level of some services where they were underperforming. The two best examples of this are Social Services and Development Control. Improvements were achieved based on a clear focus on outcomes and regular monitoring of performance. The 'Delivering Excellence' Programme has supported a real improvement in service delivery across the Council, including the introduction of a customer access centre in the Town Hall. Nearly three-quarters of residents are at least satisfied with the way the Council is running things (this is a substantial improvement on the previous survey). Sixty six per cent of key Performance Indicators have improved since 2002/03 including many in poorly performing service areas. The Performance Handbook is good but systems are not consistently applied, and a strong performance culture is not embedded across the Council.
- 68 There is regular service monitoring. Services report regularly to each directorate's management group but the form of reporting is inconsistent. The Council has adjusted its review cycle to reflect poor performance in Development Control and in Social Services following a poor inspection rating. The improvement of these two services has been regularly tracked at corporate and departmental levels. However, there is a lack of open, consistent and transparent corporate and departmental systems to track all performance, highlight exceptions, agree actions and monitor progress.
- 69 The Council's approach to service review by users and other stakeholders is good. The Council has a large number of fora where it discusses issues with stakeholders. Meetings are held with providers, for example residential nursing providers to share good practice and issues of concern.
- 70 Target setting in the Council is not fully consistent. Clear targets are set that reflect the Council's corporate priorities. Increasingly these targets are outcome-based, measurable and time bound. However, some are not. This inconsistency means that the Council cannot be sure that it is achieving all the outcomes that it is seeking.
- 71 The Council is not consistently managing individual performance. While the Council has a corporate appraisal scheme and the vast majority of staff receive an annual appraisal, target setting does not consistently link to corporate objectives. A recent Investors in People assessment highlighted concerns regarding target setting. The corporate scheme is also not routinely monitored in terms of the quality of appraisals. The inconsistent approach to how appraisals are conducted throughout the Council means that it cannot be sure that it is using individual performance to drive improvement.

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- 72** Effective use is made of the Outcome Improvement Plans within the Council and within partnerships to drive service improvements. These plans all follow a clear corporate framework which makes monitoring of progress transparent. It is more difficult to monitor individual service plans because of their inconsistent framework and approach.
- 73** Sharing of information with partners is good. The Local Public Service Agreement project officers group meets regularly and reports on progress against targets. The group is open about the issues facing the partners and action to be taken to achieve targets. For example, comprehensive performance information is given to the community safety strategy group and progress over time is plotted. However, internal learning is not strong and individual departments do not systematically share learning with each other. As a result good and poor practice is not shared throughout the Council.
- 74** Challenge within the Council is inadequate, including by the Overview and Scrutiny committee and the Best Value and Performance Improvement committee. Progress reports to Cabinet on the 'Delivering Excellence' programme are discursive, this makes it difficult to track where progress is falling behind and action needs to be taken. Where reports are provided questioning is often not strategic and is focussed on individual points of interest. Members are unclear about the purpose of these two committees and their value to the Council.
- 75** The Council's approach to complaints is not systematically driving improvement. There is a clear corporate complaints process which is accessible on the Council's website. Complaints are regularly reported up through the organisation and to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. Not all complaints from elected members are dealt with in a timely manner. Nearly half of those residents who did complain were not satisfied with the way in which their complaint was dealt with.
- 76** The Council has an inconsistent approach to external evaluation. There has been some external evaluation, for example Public Protection and Building Control have each received Chartermark awards but this has not been systematically sought across the Council and on a regular basis. The two areas that have seen significant improvement, Development Control and Social Services, are examples of where statutory external inspection has had a positive impact.

What has been achieved?

- 77 The Council is performing well in this area.
- 78 There is a strong link between local and national and shared priorities. The key themes in the Community Strategy translate well to the shared priorities in this section. For example, 'being safe and secure' with 'safer and stronger communities' and 'healthy and caring' with 'healthier communities'. There isn't a specific local theme for older people. However, their needs and aspirations are dealt with under all the key themes in the Community Strategy.
- 79 The ambitions in the Community Strategy and Borough Strategic Plan are service based. There is a clear link between what the Council and its partners are seeking to achieve and the shared priorities. The priorities are also the product of extensive consultation with local communities. At the service level they are therefore a clear reflection of the needs and aspirations of the local communities.
- 80 Improved performance management has led to higher levels of performance across a range of services. For example, 66 per cent of performance indicators have improved between 2002/03 and 2004/05. In particular performance has improved in two previously underperforming services, Development Control and Social Services. The 'Delivering Excellence' programme has been driving the improvement in capacity to support the level of service reflected in this section. It has provided an effective focus for the development of the organisation. Effective partnership working has been used by the Council to increase its capacity in all the shared priority areas.
- 81 Safer and stronger communities are key priorities for the Council and its partners. It is an area of particular concern for local people. Strong partnership working through the community safety group has resulted in reductions in crime in targeted areas and a significant reduction in anti-social behaviour. Some criminal activity remains high including robbery and theft from motor vehicles which is being targeted. Fear of crime is reducing in the Royal Borough.
- 82 There is mixed performance in the area of sustainable communities and transport. The Council is delivering well on its ambitions for the local environment, in particular in recycling and street cleaning. Its ambitions for regeneration and the local economy are limited. However, it has had successes in these areas. In Housing it is meeting most of its ambitions. The area where the Council is making limited progress is transport. This is an area of concern to partners, in particular public transport.
- 83 The Council is engaging with older people through a variety of means, including an annual conference and older people fora. It is working effectively with partners to address the needs of older people, both in terms of service provision and the wider independence agenda. Older people are seen as a group that can, and does, contribute to the local community.

- 84 The Council has adopted an effective partnership approach to healthier communities. It is one of the key themes in the Community Strategy - 'healthy and caring'. The Council works effectively with partners, in particular the Primary Care Trust, to identify health needs and configure services to meet them. Health is seen as a corporate issue. It is not restricted to Social Services. There are health projects aimed at different age groups and BME groups in different parts of the Council. The Ellington project is a good example of where the health needs of the local community have been thoroughly researched and services developed to meet them.
- 85 Services for children and young people are performing well. For example, there are good outcomes for most children and young people, but there are vulnerable minorities where outcomes are not as good as those of the wider population. There is strong partnership working in this area, in particular with health. The Council is performing well at helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation, to keep safe, to contribute to society and to achieve economic well being.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 86 The Council has ambitions to improve those services it is responsible for and which contribute to a sustainable community. However, overall achievement in this area is mixed. The Royal Borough is situated within an area of significant economic prosperity, close to London but also with good access to major transport links including Heathrow Airport, motorways, mainline and commuter rail links. These offer major opportunities to residents within the Royal Borough, but it is the associated challenges and risks that appear to be the major focus for the Council. Achievements in housing and transport are mixed, with focus and delivery in some areas bringing clear and beneficial outcomes for local people.
- 87 The resources deployed by the Council to address local economic and labour market issues are limited as are its ambitions. The Council has not yet developed a shared vision with its partners for the economic future of the Royal Borough. Nevertheless, within these constraints the Council has had a real impact on some aspects of the local economy and this is clear in the current development of Maidenhead town centre, the visitor management activities, training and re-skilling within the local workforce, and the services available to local and small businesses.
- 88 The Council's approach to regeneration is effective but is limited by its ambitions. The Ellington Project is an excellent example of geographically focused support directly impacting on the wellbeing of a single community. Councillors and officers clearly understand and are enthusiastic about the development of Windsor town centre. Work in Ellington has been successful and the approach is being rolled out in the Dedworth area. There are other pockets of deprivation within the Royal Borough where examples of this good practice have yet to be applied.

- 89 The Council has significantly improved its Development Control function in recent years. Poor performance has been tackled, a more appropriate scheme of delegation to officers agreed and ODPM has recognised that the time taken to approve applications is significantly reduced.
- 90 The Council is delivering successfully on its ambitions for the local environment. The Council has a clear and effective waste management strategy and is taking steps to ensure it is effectively implemented. Street cleaning performance is good and an initiative to improve the Council's response to graffiti has led to improved performance and a real impact for local residents. The Council is proactively extending its already successful re-cycling scheme and taking steps to improve the way it manages the disposal of waste. There is a high and growing level of public satisfaction with this service. The Council also takes its wider environmental responsibilities seriously and produces an annual Environment Statement that clearly measures the impact of the Council's activities on the environment and the steps being taken to reduce this. The Council also supports a range of education initiatives addressing issues of sustainability and cross authority work that offers advice to businesses on how best to minimise their environmental impact.
- 91 The Council has achieved most of its priorities and ambitions for the local housing market. The Council's priority of increasing affordable housing is to some extent supported by its approach to section 106, through planning gain and its own capital funding but given the scale of the problem, the priority given to this issue and progress against it is limited. The Council transferred its stock of housing to two housing associations in the mid 1990s and since then has worked well in partnership to address housing need in the Royal Borough. Bed and Breakfast is not used to accommodate homeless people, there is a range of supported housing available to other client groups that need it and there is a range of sheltered and high support needs housing for the elderly. The Council is active in seeking to tackle fuel poverty locally and its support to householders improve insulation in their homes has made a significant difference to some local residents.
- 92 The Council and its partners are making only limited progress in its ambitions for transport in the Royal Borough. Overall the Council's focus on transport is local. It is largely reactive to strategic transport issues involving the airport, motorway and major rail networks that run through the Royal Borough. Locally, the Council identifies bus services, road conditions and congestion as concerns for local people but little progress has been made in addressing these. The Council is a member of one Quality Bus Partnership, but overall bus services are poor and while the Council has sought to negotiate with providers to preserve and enhance the current network, some local partners would like greater priority to be given to this issue. Furthermore, while the Royal Borough has achieved a high standard of condition on the principal road network, the condition of minor and B roads is in the bottom quartile. However, with maintenance funding having declined over the last three years from £1.5 million to £750,000 annually, significant improvement seems unlikely.

Safer and stronger communities

- 93 The Council with its partners have an effective joint approach in reducing and preventing crime. The Council is a key member of the community safety partnership which has recently developed a comprehensive community safety strategy after extensive community consultation. The strategy links to a crime and disorder audit which has been commended by Government Office South East. This has had a positive impact on ensuring the Council and its partners have an effective approach to community safety.
- 94 The Council works well in partnership via the community safety strategy group which links to more tactical groups including the drug action and youth offending teams. The Council has worked in partnership with the police to develop a comprehensive CCTV system, has introduced community wardens and provided Council funding for the Berkshire Bobby scheme run by Thames Valley Police. These are examples of how partnership working is having a direct impact on reducing crime and the fear of crime in the Royal Borough.
- 95 Work is progressing to improve the sharing of information between partners to ensure that appropriate intelligence is used to minimise criminal activity. The community safety group monitors progress of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) strategy on a regular basis and Council officers now attend police performance monitoring meetings. There has been good performance in reducing some areas of criminal activity and the fear of crime including domestic burglaries down by 4.6 per cent and theft of a motor vehicle down by 1.6 per cent. However some criminal activity remains high including robbery and theft from motor vehicles which is being targeted as a priority for improvement by the CDRP.
- 96 Anti-social behaviour (ASB) has been significantly reduced. The Council and its partners have effectively tackled ASB through a series of multi agency schemes and initiatives. These include an effective process for removing graffiti, working with the police to target retailers selling alcohol to under age drinkers and targeting ASB in specific areas. There are effective mechanisms to allow the public to report ASB through a dedicated telephone service and, on line reporting. Concerns regarding ASB are integrated into service delivery including the effective removal of abandoned vehicles, clear up days on local housing estates using multi agencies. As a result ASB has been significantly reduced and community satisfaction levels have been improved with the majority in the top quartile nationally.
- 97 The Council and its partners are targeting the reduction of and impact of drugs and alcohol misuse. The Council is an effective partner of the Drug Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) and CDRP while a local delivery plan has been written in consultation with key partners. Targets from the plan, which are regularly monitored, are included in the community safety strategy and take into account national requirements while responding to local priority needs. These include concerns related to young people targeted in a young people's substance misuse group.

- 98** The Council has also worked with the Police to tackle underage and binge drinking through licensing and enforcement of retailers selling alcohol. The Council has introduced several alcohol free zones, a dispersal zone in Maidenhead town centre, while a policy has been introduced to create a presumption that any applications for new licences to sell alcohol will be refused in Maidenhead. The Council is targeting resources at vulnerable groups and is working in a multi agency environment to target prevention, support and enforcement to minimise the impact of drug and alcohol misuse.
- 99** The Royal Borough is benefiting from a comprehensive approach to community safety. There is effective partnership working between the Council and other agencies and road traffic accidents have reduced by 19 per cent over the past three years. The Council is targeting prevention through road safety education for teenagers in local sixth forms and colleges and also seminars in local leisure centres. The 'bobby' scheme is helping to install smoke alarms, particularly for vulnerable residents, and there is a good range of safety literature available. The Council is achieving its ambitions of reducing accidents through targeted prevention in partnership with other agencies.
- 100** Emergency planning is effective. The Council has a comprehensive multi agency approach to emergency planning. It has developed an emergency plan and business continuity plan which are regularly reviewed. The Council works in partnership with appropriate agencies and other councils on issues including flood prevention and dealing with major incidents. The Council is currently working on improving business continuity in the event of a flu pandemic or other such incidence. There is an effective command and control structure in place and emergency information is widely available on the Council's website and through its publications. In partnership the Council has secured a good understanding of the risks facing the Royal Borough and the region and has plans in place to deal with major emergencies.
- 101** Local communities are supported by the Council. The Council is effective in understanding the needs of local communities through effective consultation. There is a community partnership Compact in place which enables effective support for the voluntary sector and its contribution to sustainable communities. The Council is developing effective engagement with other sectors of the community including the business sector through the local chambers of commerce and with BME communities where recorded racist incidents are low. Involvement with local faith groups is helping foster greater community cohesion and is further strengthened by local events including a multi faith football tournament and work undertaken by community wardens to further strengthen community cohesion. The Council is developing its understanding of the needs of its diverse community and is working towards building safer and stronger communities by effective engagement at a local level with all sectors of the community.

Healthier communities

- 102** The Council has a structured approach to joint working with the Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead Primary Care Trust (PCT) in relation to health and social care. There are joint targets and planning boards for specific issues such as mental health, older people and people with learning disability. There is a pooled budget scheme for a rapid response and rehabilitation team to provide intensive social care to reduce hospital admissions. There are joint funding arrangements for some posts and there is a common performance framework. These arrangements have been achieved through the work of the Local Strategic Partnership.
- 103** The Council has put in place a range of effective initiatives with other partners addressing specific health issues. For example, it has developed a comprehensive approach to healthy schools, and its Leisure Services have developed SMILE (So Much Improvement for so Little Exercise). Plans exist to establish, with the PCT, Church, schools and Housing Association, a joint health and social care one-stop shop in the Dedworth area.
- 104** The Council and its partners are in a relatively strong position to improve the health of the community through a range of partnership initiatives. Some of them are broad based and will improve health overall, such as healthy schools, whilst others are aimed at specific problems, such as smoking. As a result of these initiatives the Council is contributing actively to promoting healthier communities through effective partnership working.
- 105** There is a strong base of needs analysis for developing health services. For example, the Council worked with the PCT to complete a Health Equity Audit in 2004. In a borough where health outcomes are generally considered to be good, the audit has highlighted areas of health inequality and identified action plans to be rolled out in the next five years. In 2005/06 action had already begun, including the development of an affordable warmth strategy produced jointly by the Council and the PCT.
- 106** The Council and the PCT has identified the specific health needs of groups of individuals and has put in place plans to address them. For example, there is a joint understanding of the health inequalities of the local BME population – coronary heart disease, mental health and strokes. As a result, through its work in the Ellington Project, it is helping the BME population and in particular Asian women have greater access to health care. There are also plans to target specific health initiatives to support the traveller population.

Older people

- 107** The Council and its partners successfully deliver a co-ordinated range of services to older people. Services provided range from intensive support and home care, through to voluntary care activities, subsidised leisure activities for the elderly, health checks, reduced price travel and community safety advice. The Council is also working well with the voluntary sector to promote volunteering among older people.

- 108** The Council plans services for older people effectively. For example, the Older Persons Joint Commissioning Strategy sets out eight key priority areas for social services, health and housing to focus on. These priorities form the basis of the action plan for older people. This gives the services and partners involved clear direction for how older people will be supported in the community and by statutory agencies. Work is currently in progress to produce an Older Persons Plan in April 2006 that covers all services and partners. The shared approach ensures that all partners are focusing their resources on appropriate services for older people.
- 109** The Council is performing well in identifying and championing the needs of older people. It has a good understanding of the requirement for a holistic approach to meeting the needs of older people. The Council recognises the importance of dealing with this group on a corporate basis and with partners. There are a range of services for older people that go beyond those that are required by those that are in contact with the health and social services. These include leisure services, transport, community safety and lifelong learning.
- 110** The Council engages effectively with older people on the planning and development of services. There is an annual conference to engage older people in planning services and Older Peoples Forums were used in the summer of 2005 to consult with older people on the draft Joint Commissioning Strategy. The Council and partners are engaging directly with older people in order to identify their aspirations and needs. For example, the annual conference for older people in 2004 led to the inclusion of extra care in the Joint Commissioning Strategy and the production of a Joint Commissioning Strategy for Mental Health for Older Persons. Both key areas for older people.
- 111** The Council and its partners are performing well in managing performance against planned outcomes. The Older People's Partnership Board regularly monitors the action plan in the Joint Commissioning Strategy for Older Persons. The Board includes representatives from leisure services, community safety and the voluntary sector as well as social services, health and housing. Progress against the action plan is good (21 out of 38 actions have been achieved since May 2005). The council and partners are clear about where further action is needed to ensure that older people receive the level and type of services that they require.
- 112** The Council is performing well with partners to deliver a co-ordinated, coherent range of services that address the dimensions of independence and reflect the diversity of the older population. The Joint Commissioning Strategy brings together key partners and services to provide a full range of services to older people. This has improved the level of joint working between not only social services, housing and health, but a full range of other partners.

- 113 There have been major changes in the range of services provided for older people. For example, re-provisioning of accommodation for the elderly to provide more intensive support. The Court House Road development is a good example of how the Council has improved the provision for older persons by working in partnership with Housing Solutions, one of the local Housing Associations. The SMILE project has led to improvements in the health of older people as has the subsidised use of the leisure facilities in afternoons for older people. The Tick Tock project is boosting the independence of older people by encouraging volunteering among this group.

Children and young people

- 114 Outcomes for many children and young people in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead are good. Many children are in good health, safe and achieve well. The Council and its partners offer a range of opportunities for many young people to make a positive contribution and they are helped to achieve economic well being.
- 115 A comprehensive children's and young people's strategic partnership is in place, and there is strong partnership working with health in particular. Services for children within the Council are delivered through the Directorates of Social Care and Housing, and Education. The Youth Service is located in the Leisure, Cultural and Property Services Directorate. The Council plans to appoint a Director of Children Services by April 2006. Discussions regarding a children's trust are at an early stage. It is likely that this will centre on the delivery of services to disabled children in the first instance.
- 116 Operational services are in the main effective and well managed, with good monitoring systems in some areas. There is not yet a shared vision between services that will focus on the outcomes for all children and young people. There are individual examples of good knowledge of what young people need, for example in the youth service, but they are not yet fully incorporated into an overall, prioritised, plan across all services.
- 117 The work of all local services in ensuring that children and young people are healthy is adequate, with some strengths. Comprehensive universal services are in place and these focus well on those children and young people whose needs are most pressing. There is good health promotion work being done within schools and the community. However, it is harder to access specialist mental health services and there is not enough provision of all therapy services for children.
- 118 The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good. Children reported that they generally feel safe in their community and there is a good response from schools towards bullying. There are clear processes within social services for responding to child protection referrals and a good range of family support services for children in need. All children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker. However, the Area Child Protection Committee is under-resourced and its knowledge of the safeguarding needs of the wider population is inadequate.

- 119** The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good. The Council's inclusion support services and Ethnic Minority Achievement Service are good and they impact on targeted groups and individual pupils. The Youth Service provides a good range of voluntary learning opportunities. There are no schools in special measure or with serious weaknesses and the one school with an inadequate sixth form is receiving satisfactory support. The provision of services for pupils educated out of school is variable, although the majority receive levels of education that match their needs. There are a small number of children and young people who do not receive the amount and suitability of learning experiences that they are assessed as needing.
- 120** The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Young people are encouraged to behave responsibly, help each other and contribute to the community through work in schools, youth clubs and other settings. The Council and its partners are making good progress with developing opportunities for young people to affect decision-making, though there are still limited opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- 121** The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people achieve economic wellbeing is adequate. There is a range of childcare, adult and community learning opportunities to enable families to improve economic wellbeing. Vulnerable families and young people are appropriately housed. There is a high participation rate in education by 16-18 year olds, and there are high numbers of young people in education, employment or training. However, limited progress has been made in implementing the 14-19 strategy. The 14-19 strategic group has not yet secured the full commitment of all schools to a shared responsibility for planning and monitoring 14-19 provision borough-wide. Some aspects of provision for 14-19 year olds are under developed.

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 the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 7 to 20 November 2005.
- 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.