

Corporate Assessment Report

October 2006



# Corporate Assessment

**Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council**

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## Introduction

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

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement

Considered against the shared priorities of:

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

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

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

## Executive summary

- 5 Rotherham Council is performing well across all areas. The quality and speed of its recent improvement has been notable. At the end of 2003 it was designated a weak council, but within two years has risen to three-star status solely due to improved performance in service delivery. This corporate assessment affirms that these improvements have been matched and assisted by similar levels of improvement in corporate processes.
- 6 The improvements have been driven by strong managerial and political leadership and positive relationships with partners. There are high quality staff in key positions. Members and officers work well together throughout the organisation. Although the political majority in the Council is large and long term, there is still considerable challenge within the political system, including good scrutiny arrangements. Ethical standards are upheld.
- 7 There is an effective Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), positively assessed by the regional government office, which has been further strengthened by a recent shift to a more devolved model. However, some of the consequences of this at area assembly level have still to be worked through.
- 8 There is above average approval from a wide range of stakeholders for the job the Council is doing, and residents have been consistent in their level of satisfaction with the overall service provided by the Council. In some specific areas, such as street cleaning, resident satisfaction levels have improved markedly, confirming that they have noticed significant improvements in the quality of service. This attention to user focus has been a powerful dynamic moving the Council forward, and is continuing with the opening of new customer service centres across the borough.
- 9 There have also been significant achievements in areas such as housing renewal, regeneration, children's services, crime and anti-social behaviour, and street scene. Health remains a major issue for the borough, although there are positive indicators in some areas. There are examples of good services for older people but the Council does not yet show a fully co-ordinated approach across all services.
- 10 A designated neighbourhood renewal area, Rotherham has shown creditable progress in tackling deprivation, narrowing the gap between its performance and national averages in key areas such as employment and educational achievement. Challenges remain in terms of the equalisation of the quality of life across the borough itself, with only limited evidence of comparative improvement in health and educational achievement inequalities between the borough's deprived and better off areas.

- 11 The Council is sustaining its strong community connections through extensive programmes of consultation and engagement, including with vulnerable sectors and minority groups in the borough. Along with many of its partners and residents the Council shares a history of Rotherham which acknowledges the difficulties experienced in the borough towards the end of the last century as it struggled to adjust to the decline of the coal mining and steel industries, and measures its progress since that period. In response, the Council takes its community cohesion responsibilities seriously, and an awareness of these issues is apparent across its corporate processes and in Council activities. However, some issues of strategy and engagement with the voluntary sector, and with BME communities, have still to be fully resolved.
- 12 The Council is proactively planning to tackle future challenges such as diminishing funding, devolution to neighbourhoods, and strategic and operational capacity through a major review of its corporate processes. Workforce planning and organisation development are being used to review capacity including staff skills and roles.
- 13 Despite the pace of change, corporate processes are substantially embedded across the organisation. The Council's performance management is sharp, effective and leads to change. It is now exporting its own expertise in this area across the LSP.
- 14 The Council achieves good value for money overall, demonstrating clear commitment backed up by appropriate systems and methodologies. However, it has more to do in terms of defining its position on strategic commissioning. Although it enjoys a long term and successful strategic partnership with BT, the balance between in-house provision and external commissioning is currently weighted to the former, and more work needs to be done to assess whether this position is sustainable given future needs for cost efficiencies.
- 15 The council is actively planning for a changing future in the knowledge that the amount of external funding it has received in the past will not be sustained. Partly because of its industrial history, Rotherham has attracted funding from a variety of sources, including successful Single Regeneration Budget bids for each round. It also has healthy balances. Both these income sources have been deployed when setting Council tax levels, and Rotherham has not yet had to face the relentless financial pressures experienced by many authorities. Anticipating change, the Council is developing exit strategies and a thorough system of external funding review.
- 16 This foresight typifies a Council which is not resting on its laurels. Ambitions for the Borough are regularly reviewed. There is a regular turnover in strategies and action plans to reflect changing needs and national priorities. A new prioritisation framework across the community and corporate strategies was established last year after extensive consultation, and this is now driving a range of strategies for the borough and the Council. The Council is imbued with an improvement culture which arose from the need to escape its previously weak position; it is now capitalising on it in a determined drive to become excellent.

## Areas for improvement

- 17 The need to rise from a previously weak position has imbued the Council with an improvement culture which it now needs to capitalise on to become fully excellent. The Council recognises that there are still considerable challenges ahead and what follows is a summary of the most important priorities for improvement.
- 18 The most intractable areas of performance remain in the borough's deprived neighbourhoods. While Rotherham as a whole is improving its position against national averages in many key areas, the Council needs to reinforce its efforts to reduce inequalities within the borough itself. The Council needs to draw on its experience in neighbourhood working to innovate in the ways residents access services and participate in democratic processes. Engagement with local communities on the ground should include developing a better understanding with ethnic minority groups of the scope and results of consultation.
- 19 The council's strong partnership arrangements would be further enhanced by a focus on shared governance arrangements with the LSP and other partners. This needs to include consideration of the potential for joint commissioning and shared service provision. The Council should continue its efforts to develop more integrated ICT arrangements with its partners. Enhanced performance management and expansion of a learning culture, building on the Council's expertise in these areas, could be used to stimulate greater challenge and joint ownership of issues.
- 20 While performance management arrangements within the Council are good overall, health scrutiny is not fully developed, and achievements in this area suggest there is more scope for focusing on the health elements of Rotherham Alive.
- 21 The drive for better value for money needs to inform a review of the Council's position on strategic commissioning. More work needs to be done to subject current provision to options appraisal, and to develop a more strategic approach to procurement. These considerations need to play into the current reassessment of the BT contract. The Council also needs to give particular attention to commissioning arrangements with the voluntary sector, where activity is currently fragmented. The Council also needs to embed the workforce development approach it has embarked on and consider how it can continue to address issues relating to sickness, and recruitment and retention.
- 22 Finally the Council needs to press on with its agenda to improve service accessibility for rural communities, and bring the work on its rural strategy to a conclusion so that it is in a position to progress improvements.

## Summary of assessment scores

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

### \*\*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

- 23** Rotherham is a metropolitan borough in the South Yorkshire conurbation, adjoining Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster. Rotherham itself is the main urban centre, but over 50 per cent of the borough is rural in character, with 29 parish councils. It is well-connected to the motorway network via the M1 and M18, and the recently opened Robin Hood Sheffield/Doncaster airport offers new potential for international travel.
- 24** The borough has been strongly shaped by its economic history, with its two former foundations of prosperity, coal mining and the steel industry, badly affected by decline towards the end of the last century. It has responded well to these challenges, with visible changes to the landscape through remediation work and business park development and a determination to close the gap with national economic and social indicators. Significant challenges remain to ensure that the fruits of economic development are distributed more evenly across the borough.
- 25** Rotherham is ranked as the 63rd most deprived borough in the country, but has improved its position in recent years. Employment rates are now close to the national average, though the proportion of residents on sickness benefits is well above regional and national averages. Health remains a major issue, with life expectancy for both men and women below national averages, and a high proportion of non-decent homes in the borough. However there have been some significant reductions in the high rates of coronary heart disease and teenage pregnancies over the past few years. Crime has generally decreased in recent years, and fear of crime along with it, though this remains an issue with some more vulnerable groups.
- 26** The borough has a population of 252,300, with a black and minority ethnic (BME) population of 4.1 per cent. The largest ethnic group is of Pakistani heritage, at 1.9 per cent. The BME population is not widely distributed across the borough and is concentrated in areas adjacent to Rotherham town centre. In Masbrough neighbourhood, for example, the proportion of BME residents rises to 17 per cent. The age structure of the population is relatively young, with more children and young people than the national and regional averages. At present the proportion of older people is in line with the national average but is projected to grow as life expectancy improves.

## The Council

- 27** The Council has 63 members. There is a strong Labour majority with 55 seats. The Conservatives have six seats, and two are independently held. The Council operates a leader and cabinet model, with a ten member all-Labour cabinet. Nominated non-executive members act as advisers to cabinet portfolio holders. There are five scrutiny panels, addressing children and young people's services, adult services and health, sustainable communities, regeneration and democratic renewal. There is also an overarching performance and scrutiny overview committee. The Council has a system of area assemblies, seven in all, each covering three wards.
- 28** The corporate management team is led by the chief executive and includes seven executive directors, with line responsibility for 30 senior managers. The Council employs a total of 9,313 full time equivalent staff, plus 4,350 in schools. The net revenue budget for 2006/07 is £185.4 million. Council tax rose by 4.9 per cent this year with the level for band D now standing at £1,070. The Council is also managing major external funding for programmes such as the single regeneration budget, neighbourhood renewal and the regional development agency's South Yorkshire Investment Plan budget. In all, £100 million external funding has been drawn down over the past two years.
- 29** The Council has a major strategic partnership with BT, delivered through a joint venture company, RBT Connect Ltd (RBT). It has transferred its former social housing stock of 22,000 homes to an arm's length management organisation (ALMO), 2010 Rotherham Ltd. Rotherham is part of the South Yorkshire housing market renewal area.
- 30** Rotherham's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was reorganised last year. The partnership board now comprises 23 members, with a chief executive officer group comprising representatives from the Council, police, voluntary sector, further education sector, chamber of commerce and the director of public health. The LSP has an independent chair and a full time manager with four staff. Five theme boards based on the priority areas in the community strategy feed into the partnership board.
- 31** A new community strategy was adopted in 2005. This sets out a vision for the borough to 2020, with targets to 2010. The strategy identifies five main priority areas: Rotherham Achieving, Learning, Alive, Safe and Proud. In addition there are two cross-cutting themes: Fairness and Sustainable Development.
- 32** The Council's own corporate plan, Pride in Performance, covers the same period as the community strategy and is based on the same priorities. A separate three year corporate improvement plan focuses on the development of the Council as an organisation.

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

### Ambition

- 33** The Council is performing well in this area. Its challenging but achievable vision is based on extensive consultation and analysis, and is given focus through strong community leadership and partnership working. The Council has already demonstrated rapid and substantial improvement and shows a good balance between pro-activity and responsiveness.
- 34** Rotherham has an achievable and sustainable set of aspirations which are shared with partners across the locality, grouped as:
- **Alive:** health promotion, cultural, social and sporting activities;
  - **Achieving:** economic development and reducing inequalities;
  - **Learning:** lifelong learning;
  - **Safe:** clean, green and safe neighbourhoods with high quality homes and facilities; and
  - **Proud:** cohesive communities, external image.
- 35** These are underpinned by two cross-cutting themes:
- **Fairness:** equality and diversity, open and accessible services; and
  - **Sustainable development:** ensuring the right conditions to sustain economic growth while minimising the harm from development.
- 36** The community strategy for the area sets out visions for Rotherham in 2020 across all these strategic and cross-cutting themes. Each theme has targets and milestones stretching to 2010 to give structure to the improvement journey.
- 37** The Council demonstrates strong community leadership, recognising the importance of partnership working and harnessing their capacity to achieve shared ambitions and outcomes. The Council promotes and lives the community strategy across all its themes, not just at senior levels but right across the organisation. Partner relations are open and constructive, assisted by the collaborative style of the Council's leader and chief executive.
- 38** The LSP is effective, and was awarded the maximum rating when assessed by Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber last year, but financial pressures are compelling the Council and its partners to look more carefully at budget alignment and pooling, shared services and commissioning arrangements. The partnership has shown self-awareness by openly debating a new organisational model, resulting in the adoption of a more devolved structure reflecting the priority themes of the community strategy. This will strengthen its ability to tackle these challenges.

- 39** Area assemblies are currently being reorganised to reinforce the new approach and will in future be established as mini-LSPs, but there are tensions about the implications of local partnership working among members at ward level. Changes are needed because the use of area assemblies for community engagement has had only mixed success. While some are effective, exploiting devolved budgets and local action plans based on good quality local intelligence gathering, they have not been entirely successful in engaging with the full diversity of local communities and gaining local ownership.
- 40** Rotherham's ambitions are based on a sound analysis of needs. Consultation for the recently revised community strategy was extensive and included work with community interest groups such as older people, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transexual (LGBT) communities, disabled people and BME residents. There were some particularly innovative approaches to consultation with children and young people. Consultation outcomes are carefully tracked and are reflected in the final strategy and action plans.
- 41** Consultation is effective in Rotherham. A longstanding (but twice refreshed and newly stratified) citizens' panel has been regularly consulted over the last five years on a wide range of Council and partner issues. Executive summaries of the results of each Reach Out survey are distributed to all consultees as well as used by the Council and its partners to drive improvement. There are numerous examples of more specific consultation, for example the Council has engaged the voluntary sector and young people in developing a rural strategy for the borough.
- 42** Consultation activity with the different BME groups within Rotherham is extensive but there are some unresolved issues. Although relationships with the BME communities are generally good and constructive, and the Council has developed capacity in the sector through financial support, some groups feel under-informed about the results of consultation exercises and the actions which follow.
- 43** Members are not afraid to make difficult choices when developing ambitions for the community. For example a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deal for leisure centres and pools will reduce the number from nine to four while improving the overall quality of the service. Given the public's sensitivity to pool closures, this shows a willingness to pursue strategies of engagement and persuasion in the interest of service development.
- 44** The Council's performance in gathering extensive intelligence about the local community is good. Its Local Index of Multiple Deprivation is an example of notable practice. This compilation supplements nationally available data by bringing together detailed information about deprivation at local area level, using a range of local indicators. The Council has used it as an effective means of targeting areas for neighbourhood renewal activity.

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- 45 There is a mature and open approach to sharing data between partners. A good example of this is the information around enterprise support and business investment which has been gathered jointly by the Council, Chamber of Commerce, Business Link and Renaissance South Yorkshire. Investment enquiries are openly shared by these agencies even though there is competition between them. In some operational areas collaboration is held back by technological barriers. Safer neighbourhood teams have been set up in two localities, sharing local intelligence to identify liveability hotspots, but a central database bringing together Council and police data is not yet fully developed.
- 46 The Council shows a good balance between innovation, responsiveness and compliance. It has been innovative in some areas, for example the early move to a strategic partnership with BT. It is also adept at learning from others, and is highly responsive in character - a culture which has greatly facilitated partnership working in the borough. Innovation is balanced by a noticeable compliance culture. This is partly the result of the Council's former weak status and the need to advance rapidly from that position. The Council has turned this to advantage by using compliance with inspectorates' recommendations to build a sense of achievement and confidence within the organisation. It has reinforced this by pursuing awards such as Beacon Council status, and has enjoyed and proclaimed regular successes.

## Prioritisation

- 47 The Council is performing well in this area. Priorities are organised within a thorough framework, and based on a firm needs analysis. There are good service and financial planning arrangements, but there is scope for development. The Council's positive financial situation means that its systems for prioritisation have not yet been thoroughly tested. Arrangements are in place to ensure a firm and continuing focus on priority areas.
- 48 The strategic and cross-cutting themes in the community strategy form a solid framework not only for the Council's corporate plan, but also for all supporting plans and policy documents, and for a wide range of partnership documents. Each community strategy priority area contains nine key partnership priorities, all with SMART<sup>1</sup> indicators and targets and naming an accountable body within the LSP. Where the Council is the accountable body, priority objectives are reflected in its corporate plan, and firmly driven through into service plans. Team and individual plans then extend the 'golden thread' deep into the organisation.
- 49 There is a high level of awareness of the framework among staff, members and other stakeholders and it is an important means of ensuring a Rotherham-wide focus on key areas. This applies across both the Council's own programme areas, and also the work of its strategic partners through the LSP. The discipline of the prioritisation framework makes staff and partners think through what their activity can contribute across all the priority areas, and not just the ones with which they are traditionally associated.

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<sup>1</sup> Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound

- 50 Tackling deprivation is a major priority for the Council and its partners. The neighbourhood renewal strategy (NRS) is an integral part of the community strategy, and has been used to identify and prioritise thirteen geographical areas of deprivation, each for its own reasons. For example, Flanderwell, with a population of only 523, is targeted because of low educational attainment, low skill levels, worklessness and poor health. The much larger Masbrough neighbourhood, with a population of 6,646 including 17 per cent BME residents, is targeted in terms of incomes, educational attainment and skill levels, worklessness, poor health and crime.
- 51 The Council gives considerable priority to equalities and diversity issues. The community strategy priority Rotherham Proud embraces diversity and community cohesion, while the Fairness theme addresses equalities and choice. The Council's race equality strategy shows a clear commitment to promote race equality, to embed it into all council activities, and to deliver improvements to Rotherham's diverse communities. The latest version of the NRS identifies, in addition to the geographical areas, three priority communities of interest: disabled people and their carers, vulnerable older people and their carers, and disadvantaged BME communities, including people seeking refuge and travellers.
- 52 The Council's service and financial planning processes for both capital and revenue budgets are good, but could be further developed. Real choices about priorities are made during the annual base budget review through the identification of the key partnership priorities, the priority objectives within the corporate plan, and in service improvement plans. However, although there is public involvement in the budget consultation process, some detailed schedules of budget savings and pressures are not made public in Council business papers. Priority actions within the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) require further policy endorsement in some significant cases.
- 53 While sound systems are in place, they have not been fully tested because prioritisation decisions have been eased by the Council's positive financial situation. With extensive reserves and external funding, the Council has not yet faced some of the tough choices which have become routine in many authorities. Recent Council tax rises have not been significantly below the government's maximum guideline levels, and while there are numerous examples of resources being invested in priority areas as a result of efficiencies, areas of disinvestment across services have been relatively few.
- 54 The Council is aware of the effects that the end of external funding may have on priorities, and has taken steps to meet this risk. It has introduced a rolling external funding strategy which considers expiry two years ahead and ensures that externally-funded services are fed into the financial prioritisation process. The popular, externally-funded, neighbourhood wardens were mainstreamed as a result of this process.

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- 55** Rotherham maintains a firm focus on its strategic priorities. At LSP level, strong chairmanship and a separate chief executives officer group, with a good level of administrative support, gives a sharper business focus than could be provided through the partnership board. Rotherham's local area agreement, recently signed off by the government, flows from the community and neighbourhood renewal strategies, and gives additional prominence and delivery impetus to a range of key objectives. The associated pump priming and performance reward grants permit a greater degree of performance stretch for a number of priority targets, for example reducing the overall incapacity benefit rate.
- 56** Within the Council, Members and officers concentrate on stated priorities, with cabinet and corporate management team agendas substantially devoted to strategic issues. Member portfolios cut across priority areas and include, for example, neighbourhoods, and customer services and innovation. The cross-cutting nature of the portfolios helps the Council to view its business from different angles and to ensure it is not silo-focused.
- 57** Priorities are regularly reviewed and renewed in the light of changing needs and expectations, and the Council works to adapt national priorities to local circumstances. For example, a local debate about residential care homes for older people has resulted in a carefully thought-through approach which will close a number of homes while building two new facilities that can be converted to extra care housing as circumstances change.

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

### Capacity

- 58 The Council is performing well in this area. It has extended its capacity through joint working and its strategic service partnership. Political and managerial leadership is strong, with good development policies for both staff and members. ICT development is thorough and resulting in improvements for customers. Workforce development approaches are being embedded. Value for money is good but could be further improved through a more strategic approach to commissioning.
- 59 The LSP's range of representation has helped the Council increase its capacity. Concrete initiatives have developed from work with all sectors, for example strong private sector involvement has assisted economic regeneration initiatives, such as business start-ups, and the voluntary sector is engaged with service delivery areas such as social day care. However, while there is active engagement with BME communities through the LSP theme boards, there are as yet no BME partners on the board or executives group. Achieving this level of BME representation would add to the capacity of the LSP and increase its credibility with local communities.
- 60 Capacity has also been increased by the Council's innovative strategic partnership with BT. For example, ICT capacity has been significantly enhanced, and system resilience improved, through an investment of £16 million in equipment and new business practices. Teamwork between the staff of the two organisations brings benefits in terms of knowledge exchange and skills development, for example learning from BT's Prince 2 project management skills has been used for major Council projects. The Council and BT are now reviewing the partnership arrangements to increase flexibility and ensure they will continue to complement and add value to the Council's progress.
- 61 While the Council has laid firm foundations for continuing ICT improvements by its thorough approach to business process re-engineering, more remains to be done. Unaudited data suggests the Council has now achieved virtually maximum performance levels on the number of service interactions with the public which are capable of electronic delivery. RBT operates a contact centre for the borough, and a well-received customer service centre has recently opened in central Rotherham; several more are planned. The award-winning Streetpride programme area (single number access to remove litter, graffiti, potholes etc.) is an example of how the Council in partnership has used these new approaches to transform service delivery. However, as yet connectivity between front line and back office systems is under-developed, and some major services are not included.

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- 62** The authority has strong and well regarded political and managerial leadership, with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities between the two. There is a culture of working together and listening to the community. A distinctive feature of this Council is the extent of joint member-officer working, for example on key groups such as the corporate procurement panel. Relationships are generally respectful and maintain professional and ethical standards. The Council has introduced more transparent recruiting processes over the past few years, which has resulted in some high quality staff appointments in key positions.
- 63** The Council has a good workforce development strategy, closely linked to its priorities, and has been proactive in identifying skills gaps and solutions with partners. One imaginative development has been a construction academy developed with the private sector to increase skills and capacity in traditional building trades. There are also areas where recruitment and retention has been improved, for example in home care services through better working conditions and supervision arrangements. Equal pay issues have been addressed through a formal collective agreement and resources to deliver a plan for single status are earmarked. Workforce development issues are being referenced in all service plans to embed the process across the organisation.
- 64** Though staff morale is good, sickness levels are among the highest 25 per cent of local authorities. The Council is tackling this issue vigorously through improved procedures which combine recognition of good attendance with firm action on persistent sickness - for example the contracts of some 200 employees have been terminated in the last two years as a result of long term sickness. These approaches have brought reductions in sickness over the past three years but the Council recognises that this continues to be an area of challenge.
- 65** The Council's strategy for improving the skills of its elected members is robust, and it has used government capacity building funds to good effect. The deployment of non-executive members as policy advisers ensures challenge to individual decision-making as well as providing political succession planning. There has been very positive uptake of community leadership training by members, who now reflect the wider perspective and readiness for change which comes from a better understanding of national context, and from meeting with representatives of other local authorities. This is important because the Council was limited in the past by an excessive focus - not entirely eliminated - on the other South Yorkshire authorities.
- 66** The Council has raised the profile of the equalities agenda within the organisation, enriching its capacity through a comprehensive framework and action plan. Extensive structures are in place to support equality and diversity, including champions, staff groups and a strategy group. The Council has moved from zero to level three of the local government equality standard since 2004, and is currently out to external assessment for level four. It has increased its proportion of BME and disabled staff over the past three years, but remains in the bottom 25 per cent of authorities for the employment of disabled people.

- 67 The Council provides good value for money overall but does not yet demonstrate a strategic approach to commissioning. It has a comprehensive capital strategy which has been recognised as notable practice under the Beacon scheme. Overall costs and unit costs are consistent with other councils providing similar levels and standards of service, allowing for local factors which have a demonstrable impact on cost. Procurement savings of over £2.6 million have been achieved over the past two years under the BT contract. However, further opportunities for efficiency are still to be explored, for example there are a number of areas where outsourcing has not yet been fully appraised as a service delivery option, and action is yet to be taken to improve on the current 'ad hoc' commissioning arrangements with the voluntary and community sector.

## Performance management

- 68 The Council is performing strongly in this area. Improved performance management has had a real impact and is a major reason for the Council's recent improvement. There is a rigorous approach based on a sound framework and good stakeholder involvement. Links to financial and risk management are in place, and scrutiny is strong. The Council applies learning well from external and internal sources but has also been proactive in exporting its expertise to partners.
- 69 The Council has a consistent and rigorous approach, underpinned by a comprehensive and clearly set out performance management framework with associated guidance. These provide it with the tools to manage performance effectively, tackle under-performance and maintain a focus on improving against corporate priorities.
- 70 Managers at all levels are clear of the purpose of the framework and promote it well amongst staff. Roles and responsibilities for members and officers are clearly laid out. Service planning is good and consistent across all services without being overly prescriptive. Plans follow the corporate themes and priorities well. The 'golden thread' continues into performance development reviews for teams and individuals. These are now in place for most staff, with a modified process being introduced to frontline pockets where it has proved difficult to embed them for practical reasons such as fragmented work timetables.
- 71 Staff performance and development is supported by a system designed to deliver clarity and clear assessments of performance and improvement, with innovation, flexibility, ownership and diversity encouraged. Extensive communication with, and recognition of, staff through newsletters, surveys and awards has assisted positive employee awareness of priorities.
- 72 Service improvement is supported by stakeholder involvement. The Council's Reach In and Reach Out surveys are used to consult on satisfaction rates and drive improvement. Service users are also involved on scrutiny panels. Service standards and customer charters are used well to communicate services to users. They are available across a wide range of services and standards are developed with community involvement. There is work underway to ensure continuing improvement in the feedback provided to the community.

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

- 73** The Council has integrated its approaches to dealing with customer complaints, comments and trends in users' needs to enhance performance. It has designed a corporate system which invites suggestions and compliments and considers emerging trends in service requests. These are used to drive service improvement. Housing repairs are now carried out by multi skilled teams that can deal with a range of problems in one visit. Work has recently begun on the integration of the present corporate customer complaints system into the CRM system.
- 74** The Council is firmly focused on improving its own corporate performance. A separate corporate improvement plan is monitored and managed by the corporate management team. It embraces key areas such as workforce development, value for money, complaints, member development and external assessment.
- 75** Systematic and effective review arrangements are used to ensure comprehensive submission, monitoring and management of data through the key bodies of the corporate management team, cabinet and scrutiny panels. The process focuses strongly on remedial action where performance slips below targeted levels. Performance monitoring reports are submitted to scrutiny with draft action plans already attached for any failing areas. The Council also makes good use of performance clinics, chaired by the deputy leader, for performance issues which are high profile, longer-term or intractable. These have brought about changes which are evident to residents, such as investigating and subsequently implementing changes in the waste management service.
- 76** Scrutiny is strong and well resourced, and is particularly effective in the area of policy development. There is a high level of acceptance of scrutiny recommendations by the cabinet, and a number of important policy changes have stemmed from scrutiny work, for example in areas such as domestic violence, and corporate parenting. Scrutiny committees have called partners and other bodies to account, for example the Environment Agency on flooding issues. However, the role of the Council in respect of health scrutiny has been consultative rather than challenging and the Council accepts it is not as developed as the wider scrutiny function.
- 77** Finance and performance management are integrated. Base budget reviews and other performance mechanisms ensure that the MTFS is fully integrated into the performance management process, for example the reviews specifically consider performance aspects and have been used to identify improvement outcomes which are monitored. There is also joint monitoring of pooled budgets, such as those shared between the Council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT).
- 78** Risk management is now well understood within the Council by members and officers. Its risk and performance management frameworks are now aligned across council activities, and risk is identified through service plans. There are specific risk assessments for the Council's major projects, such as the new Rotherham cultural centre.

- 79 The Council has been active in exporting its performance management expertise across the LSP. Last year's introduction of the new networked model of LSP working was accompanied by an overhaul of performance management arrangements. A suite of strategic indicators grouped under the new community strategy themes is reviewed by the partnership board twice yearly, with more intensive monitoring within theme groups themselves. Information is reported against baselines and targets using 'traffic light' ratings. Board members review performance results across all operational areas though the extent of challenge between partners could be improved. The Council is encouraging LSP partners to link up with its own performance data system so integrated monitoring can take place across all community strategy and local area agreement objectives.
- 80 The Council welcomes and responds well to external challenge and has an excellent record of compliance with recommendations from audit and inspectorates. Acting on external recommendations, however, is only part of a much wider learning culture. Learning from external sources is commonplace, with best practice sought out and appropriately transferred to services - for example the Council has adapted another authority's best practice on rural proofing to the Rotherham context to meet the needs of its rural population. It also transfers learning systematically and well internally. Cross programme area groups including RBT staff have been established to assist culture change and ensure ownership of key issues such as equalities, business continuity and customer complaints.

## What has been achieved?

- 81 The Council is performing well in this area. It has a strong record of achievement over the past few years, recognised by the exceptional judgement of 'improving strongly' in its last direction of travel report. It has moved from being designated as weak at the end of 2003 to being a three-star council at the end of 2005. This result has been achieved solely by improvements in service delivery. Seventy per cent of its performance indicators improved between 2002/03 and 2004/05, and unaudited figures suggest a similar level of improvement over the past year. This level of performance is endorsed by positive inspection results, and an array of awards, including Beacon service status in four areas over the past two years.
- 82 There is a close fit between local and national priorities, and the Council's corporate processes are strongly geared to the delivery of its objectives in its priority areas. Levels of achievement within the priority areas are good. On Rotherham Safe, there have been successes in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. Rotherham Learning outcomes for children and young people are good and generally improving. There has been good progress on the economic objectives within Rotherham Achieving, particularly on regeneration and jobs. Within the Rotherham Proud priority, there are some positive community cohesion initiatives, but as yet the Council's approach to older people's services is not fully co-ordinated. Health remains a major issue for the borough but there are positive indicators in a number of key areas among the Rotherham Alive priorities. The underpinning Fairness and Sustainable Development themes are influencing activity across the five priority areas.
- 83 Rotherham is designated as a neighbourhood renewal area in recognition of its levels of deprivation, and some of its progress has been in the more intractable areas measured by government floor targets. To expect short-term improvement across all these areas would be unrealistic, but nonetheless Rotherham has shown creditable performance in narrowing the gap against national performance levels in employment, educational achievement and crime, and in some key health areas such as circulatory diseases and teenage pregnancies. Challenges remain within Rotherham itself, with only limited evidence of comparative improvement in health and educational achievement between the borough's deprived and better off areas. But overall, Rotherham's position in the national index of multiple deprivation improved from 48th to 63rd most deprived borough between 2000 and 2004.
- 84 A significant indication of the borough's levels of achievement is the endorsement of its residents and stakeholders. The recent stakeholder survey showed approval ratings above corporate assessment averages in virtually all areas. While overall resident satisfaction has not been tested since 2003, the rating at that time of 55 per cent, as well as being above average when adjusted for deprivation, had remained constant compared with the previous survey in 2000, at a time when virtually every Council in the country showed a decline.

## Sustainable communities and transport

- 85** The Council has made significant and readily observed improvements for its residents. Poor environmental legacies from the borough's industrial past are being ameliorated through extensive remediation work and attention to the borough's 'gateway' entrances. There have been visible achievements in waste management, street cleanliness and low-level environmental nuisance such as graffiti. Housing is improving, aided by significant investment, but there remain significant challenges in progressing to the government's decent homes standard. The Council is tackling some problematic transport issues with new initiatives.
- 86** The community has seen a rise in the number of new businesses and available jobs. Rotherham has almost closed its employment rate gap with the national average, performing much better in this regard than the neighbourhood renewal area average. The Council has contributed to narrowing the gaps for worklessness and average earnings through its regeneration activity, such as the redevelopment of the former colliery sites at Manvers and Dinnington, and is achieving high business survival rates. It is also supporting vocational routes for young people to enable them to find jobs near to their homes.
- 87** The Council's regeneration programmes are well planned and designed, and incorporate good consultation mechanisms. It is using its management of assets to achieve its regeneration objectives, for example the buying and selling of sites to facilitate the progress of the town centre renaissance plan. Plans are now being implemented which combine physical and visual improvement with supporting social and environmental elements. For example, the Council is developing a town centre social environmental action plan which uses learning from other councils' mistakes in renewing infrastructure without consideration of social impacts. This is important as the town centre's retail and cultural facilities emerged as a significant issue for residents during the community strategy consultation.
- 88** In accordance with its sustainable development priority the Council is leading by example in its own building design. New council building incorporates sustainable building features including zero CO2 emissions. The Council operates environmental management for its own activities and has EMAS and ISO 14001 awards.
- 89** The Council has performed well on public sector housing issues over the past three years, with considerable improvements in void turnaround time, time taken to complete non-urgent repairs, percentage repair appointments made and kept, and rent collection. These are strong indicators of improved service delivery and value for money. Rotherham has an excellent record on homelessness and works in partnership with a range of agencies on prevention. It has no street homelessness and has not used hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation for some years.

- 90 The good quality ALMO has enabled a drawdown of significant investment for improving the Borough's housing and continuing the implementation of its decent homes programme. Currently the overall performance against the decent homes standard is not good but there is a resourced plan in place to achieve it for all properties by 2010. Clearance of sub-standard or excess public sector stock has already been largely completed and efforts under the housing market renewal programme are focusing on new build and refurbishment. In the period before full implementation of the programme there remains a shortage of available housing of the type that people want. The council is addressing this with new housing provision that is affordable but also of a high quality design enforced through planning requirements. Flexible extra care housing units have been developed with the potential for conversion to alternative housing needs, and eco homes are planned to incorporate environmental sustainability.
- 91 The well-promoted Streetpride initiative has ensured that levels of cleanliness across the Borough are high and a steep improvement in satisfaction ratings shows that this is recognised by residents. Streetpride ensures that the public realm and open spaces are attractive and well-maintained and residents are involved as street champions, reinforcing the Council's aim to achieve not only cleanliness but civic pride.
- 92 The Council's waste management service is of a high quality. In particular, it has achieved a major improvement in recycling and composting, rising from poor performance in 2002/03. There has also been an impact upon waste produced, with actual quantities reducing. Waste taken to landfill has decreased and the Council has made provision for complying with landfill diversion requirements in the medium term. Waste planning for the long-term future is still under development with major decisions yet to be made.
- 93 There is a trend away from public transport usage, and for residents, there are issues of concern in relation to traffic congestion, car parking in the town centre, and rural transport. These problems are hindering access to economic, social and learning opportunities in the borough. In response the Council is strongly promoting public transport, cycling and walking. It has achieved local pockets of improvement in diverting people on to public transport, for example by using planning requirements to facilitate public transport to new development; requiring housing developers to fund travel passes; and promoting quality bus corridors. It also seeks to reduce its own car usage by monitoring employee car use, and this is showing a slight improvement.
- 94 The Council generally provides good quality highways but this is not matched by similar good conditions on its footways, an essential part of encouraging people to walk rather than use the car. However, to redress this balance the Council is committed to placing a greater emphasis on improving footway condition this year by diverting funding to this area.
- 95 The Council is at an early stage of making an impact on rural needs. However, rural issues are being addressed and the Council has sought out best practice from other organisations. A rural strategy is being developed. Parish councils are engaged and have all signed up to develop parish council charters.

## Safer and stronger communities

- 96** The Council is working well with partners to achieve its ambition of Rotherham Safe. Crime, anti-social behaviour and re-offending have generally reduced, though there are still issues in the area of violent crime. Emergency planning is good, and the Council has been proactive in increasing community cohesion.
- 97** The Safer Rotherham Partnership (SRP) articulates a clear analysis of and wide vision for the area in its community safety strategy. The needs, priorities and aspirations of local communities have been identified through consultation and research.
- 98** As well as securing government funding, the Council has contributed resources of its own to the community safety agenda, and has developed a methodology to ensure that support for successful initiatives is considered for inclusion in its mainstream budget. Safer neighbourhood teams are being rolled out across the borough, acting as a catalyst for a more joined up approach which will benefit residents and shows a focus on key issues and priorities. While improvements have been made to facilitate comprehensive data sharing and information gathering, there is still work to take place to achieve a fully comprehensive picture.
- 99** Targets are in place across the priorities and community safety outcomes have mostly shown considerable improvement, with burglary, robbery and vehicle crime rates below the national average and falling. This reduction includes the borough's neighbourhood renewal areas, whose crime rates are significantly below those in similar areas elsewhere in the country. Re-offending rates reduced from 63 to 51 per cent between 2003 and 2005. However there have been increases in violent crime and recorded sexual offences, where Rotherham's performance was worse than the national average in 2004/05.
- 100** There has been a 14 per cent reduction in anti-social behaviour incidents over the past three years. This has been assisted by the SRP successfully exploiting its understanding of the role of environmental factors in encouraging anti-social behaviour in particular locations. Concern over anti-social behaviour has been high among residents compared to national averages, but there is good partnership working between the Council, the ALMO and the police to address the issues.
- 101** Rotherham has increased the previously low levels of drug users in treatment through an effective multi-agency approach. It has achieved a stretched target in its local public service agreement by reducing the waiting time for specialist prescribing and facilitating self-referral. However, further work is yet to be undertaken to meet identified standards and involve representatives of diverse communities in needs assessment.
- 102** There is still significant fear of crime and this fear, after showing a substantial decline in 2004, increased slightly in 2005, despite reductions in actual crime levels and the public reassurance initiatives put in place. The Council and SRP recognise the need for a greater focus on vulnerable groups, and have targets aimed at reducing incidents of domestic violence and homophobic incidents.

- 103 There is a good emergency planning framework in place and arrangements are well embedded within the Council, with wider community engagement - for example, business continuity plans for all services have been developed in partnership with BME communities.
- 104 The council has sound knowledge about community cohesion issues in the area and this is being integrated into its own action plans and programmes and those of partners. After the London bombings of July 7th 2005 the Council moved swiftly to set up a Mosque Liaison Group with the police, PCT and Voluntary Action Rotherham. This group enables the Council to monitor the temperature of local community relations and take action if appropriate.
- 105 The Council has worked hard to send out positive messages around community cohesion and live out its priority areas of Proud and Fairness, with many staff and members showing considerable personal investment. It is committed to developing greater community involvement at neighbourhood level, not only through area assemblies and parish councils, but also through specific initiatives such as a neighbourhood management pilot in the housing renewal pathfinder area of Eastwood. Reporting of LGBT and racist incidents has increased, with all incidents acted on. Overall, the percentage of residents who believe that people of different backgrounds get on well together rose from 41 per cent to 45 per cent between 2002 and 2004, and 58 per cent agree that their local area is a place where people of different ages get on well together.

## Healthier communities

- 106 Health is a major issue for the borough and indicators are generally below national averages. However, Rotherham has made significant progress in some key areas relating to health inequalities and the Council has contributed to these achievements.
- 107 The Council and its partners recognise that, although the gap has been narrowed, there is still much work to be done to meet national targets, and there is as yet only limited evidence that health inequalities across Rotherham are being eroded.
- 108 Outcomes on issues affecting life expectancy are mixed. There have been improvements in the rate of coronary heart disease, but the mortality rate from malignant cancer has increased. The number of smokers in Rotherham has decreased by only 1 per cent in the last three years and the Council and PCT are now putting in place more aggressive policies to tackle this, including the appointment of a smoking cessation manager from neighbourhood renewal funding. Overall life expectancy for both males and females is improving roughly in line with national averages but from a lower base, particularly for men.

- 109** The Council has been proactive in its approach to tackling teenage pregnancies. In the Rawmarsh area, a reduction of more than 30 per cent has been achieved through initiatives including provision of a well-resourced youth clinic and a supportive school environment. Teenage pregnancy rates overall have fallen in line with other neighbourhood renewal areas, and the gap with the England average has narrowed slightly.
- 110** The Council is clear about its role in relation to the health agenda, defining it as one of prevention and promotion, with an emphasis on equalities. This role is clearly understood by partners and staff, and public consultation and analysis of policies and key trends have been used to inform activities. The preventive and promotional role is shared with partners and is clearly prioritised by the LSP.
- 111** The partnership between the Council and the PCT supports achievements in public health. There are protocols for information sharing between the two bodies, and a jointly produced public health strategy which clearly links the health inequalities agenda to other priority areas, for example poverty and economic well-being. Pooled budgets with the PCT have not expanded beyond learning disabilities and aids and adaptations, but there are jointly funded projects in place, for example on drug litter removal. There remain disagreements around specific actions that could have a significant impact on improving health within Rotherham, for example the speed of progress towards a smoke-free borough.
- 112** There are inconsistencies and some omissions in the monitoring of health issues. Within the community strategy accountability for a number of specific Rotherham Alive actions are shared between the Council and PCT, but the Council's contributions to these actions are not fully represented in its corporate plan. To some extent this is remedied by the public health strategy and the local area agreement but tracking the thread of some priorities through the published documents is more difficult than it needs to be. Linkages to other areas of activity are fully recognised but not always specifically monitored, for example the impact of the Council's investment in housing on health outcomes is not measured.

## Older people

- 113** The Council's approach to older people's services is not yet fully co-ordinated, but extensive and high quality consultation work has ensured that it is aware of older people's needs and views, and it is in the process of developing an action plan to address them.
- 114** Although there are currently many activities targeted at older people, for example in adult community learning, a co-ordinated approach to older people's services is not yet embedded across the Council. It is only now in the process of agreeing an action plan to bring together its activity across the sector and enable future performance monitoring. There is no specific co-ordinating post for older people's services beyond social care, and no older people's champions within programme areas other than social care. A scrutiny member acts as older people's champion for the Council, and in this role has been active in the community and in chairing consultation meetings during the development of the strategy. However, there is little awareness of this role among older people in Rotherham.

- 115** Mainstream social care services for older people are generally good, earning a recent Commission for Social Care Inspection judgement of 'serving most people well, with a promising capacity for improvement'. The Council is beginning to implement a modernisation programme for adult social care. Its first extra care housing scheme recently opened, and two more are due to open in the next year. A rationalisation of residential care is underway, with a phased closure of nine unfit homes and the opening of two new ones which are flexible enough to move to extra care developments as needs change. This represents a coherent strategy to balance independent living with residual care needs and demonstrates the Council's ability to take difficult decisions when reconciling national priorities with local needs.
- 116** Beyond care, it is difficult to measure achievement in outcomes for older people as performance indicators are not yet well developed. However, it is notable that the Council is actively engaged in improving a number of services prioritised by older people, such as crime, leisure facilities and town centre retail facilities. An older persons' housing strategy has recently been developed. Action to reduce fuel poverty is a priority, with the Council demonstrating good performance given its low decency rating for housing stock. Other areas of Council responsibility which are of stated interest to older people, such as the condition of footways, are improving only slowly, and there are relatively low satisfaction rates for services such as libraries and parks among older people.
- 117** In deprived areas, there has been little progress in employment rates for the over-50s compared to the national average, and significant gaps continue to exist within Rotherham. The Council has recently identified vulnerable older people and their carers as a priority community of interest in its NRS.
- 118** The Council's processes for consulting with older people about services are well developed, including the segmented use of its citizen's panel, and focus group work with the voluntary sector and BME communities. Older people's input to the development of the community strategy was carefully distinguished within the consultation results, and there is evidence of particular needs and issues being addressed as part of the finished document.
- 119** Recently, this process of careful and detailed consultation, supplemented by discussions with partners such as the PCT and Foundation Hospital Trust, has also been used to inform the drafting of a strategy for older people. The strategy is wide-ranging, focuses strongly on well-being rather than social care dependency and is firmly linked to the community strategy. It is a good example of the Council responding to a national priority with a strong corporate approach rooted in its local priorities. It shows a firm grasp of issues of concern to older people, including safety, work and skills, transport, health and housing.

## Children and young people

- 120** Council services for children and young people in Rotherham are good and outcomes for them are generally improving. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well for children and young people. The majority of children and young people appear safe. Those most at risk are well protected. Young people who are looked after by the council, with learning difficulties or in greatest need receive good care and support, including education. There has been significant improvement in the quality, provision and impact of social care and school improvement services in recent years. The majority of young people enjoy and attend school and are making progress. A range of opportunities is provided to help many young people make a positive contribution and prepare them well for their future lives. The council's youth service is good and supports the council's priority to involve, listen and respond to young people's views well.
- 121** Children and young people have been a long-term priority of the council, and it has historically invested above government guidelines. This is continuing as the council moves towards Children's Trust arrangements by 2008. The council's use of additional external funding such as regeneration monies to support priorities for children and young people is notable practice.
- 122** The council, with its partners, has set out an ambitious vision and strategy for improving outcomes for children and young people in a single plan. It is based on a thorough audit of need and links to higher-level council plans. The plan is underpinned by robust service and business plans which are focused on delivery, and effective, thorough and accountable performance management procedures. Good budget monitoring, control and planning processes provide a solid basis for realising ambitions. Value for money is good, as are procedures for consistently assuring this. Some budgets are pooled and more are aligned. However, the need to develop the commissioning strategy further is recognised by the children's board, particularly in terms of the voluntary sector's contribution.
- 123** Management of the council's services for children is good and the capacity to improve is good. Services for children and young people were brought together in October 2005 and are the direct responsibility of the executive director of the children's and young people's service. They are overseen at the highest level by a children's board. The highly regarded director for children and young people's services and lead member for children and young people provide powerful and trusted leadership, ensuring the continued drive for improvement across the service. They are well supported by a joint leadership team. The council's workforce strategies have led to significant improvement in the recruitment and retention of staff, although a workforce strategy matched to the single plan is still in development.

- 124** The council works effectively with its partners to promote and improve children's and young people's physical and mental health, including those who are looked after by the council and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A significant success is the National Healthy Schools Programme. Good mental health is positively promoted and access to a wide range of CAMHS is available within acceptable timescales. Healthcare for children who are looked after by the council is good. Some health outcomes require improvement and these are linked to the historically high levels of deprivation in some areas. However, the council and partners have plans and initiatives in place to address such health inequalities, including the promotion of breastfeeding and tackling the high number of teenage pregnancies. These initiatives are having a positive effect.
- 125** From the evidence gathered during the joint area review, children and young people in Rotherham appear safe. The council and its partners provide a good range of family advice, support and early prevention services. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the number of children on the child protection register and in those entering the looked after system. Once in care support is good. The majority of these children are placed in foster care but the number of available carers is low. Bullying is addressed well, but some concerns remain. In response to the concerns of the youth cabinet, the council has prioritised this as an area for improvement this year. A Local Safeguarding Children Board is in place and working effectively. Safe recruitment practices are in place with good co-ordinated arrangements for the management of serious offenders in the community.
- 126** The council places a high priority on the achievement and enjoyment of children and young people in school and in their communities. Early years education is of good quality, with enough early years and childcare places to meet the needs of parents. Children are well prepared for school and they make satisfactory progress by the age of seven. Standards of attainment for children and young people aged 11 and 14 are generally in line with those in similar areas and national averages. At 16 standards are in line with similar areas but remain below national averages. However, the rate of improvement in recent years has often been faster than national averages and that found in similar areas. The council and schools are aware of the need to improve the achievement of some groups of young people, including some from minority ethnic communities and boys. The council is working with schools to raise standards for these groups. Attendance is similar to that found nationally, behaviour is good and exclusions are low.
- 127** The council works with its partners to provide a good range of activities to help children and young people, including vulnerable groups, develop socially and emotionally, build their self-esteem and manage challenges in their lives. The majority are strongly encouraged to participate in decision-making and contribute to the development of plans for them. Effective multi-agency work ensures that young people are targeted and engaged in activities to deter them from anti-social behaviour and prevent offending and re-offending. Most young people who offend, who also experience mental health problems, have good access to mental health services, although 17 and 18 year olds have more difficulty due to the complexity of the system at this level.

- 128** The council has invested in regeneration and renewal activities that have provided benefits to children and young people and families and provides, with partners, good support to prepare young people for working life. Good family learning programmes have a positive effect on better outcomes for parents such as improved basic skills and on literacy and numeracy skills for young people. The educational achievement of 16–18 year olds in school is improving and the proportion of young people aged 16–19 entering employment, education or training has improved significantly in the past two years, although it is still below national averages. However, the success rates of young people achieving a level 2 qualification at the age of 19 has not improved over the past two years and remains below the national average. Housing for young people is generally good and care leavers receive good advice and support as they prepare for independent living.

## 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 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 12 to 22 June 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.