

Corporate Assessment Report

October 2006



Corporate Assessment

North Somerset 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 North Somerset Council is performing adequately in meeting the challenges it faces in the district. It has a clear vision for how it will make a positive contribution to improving the quality of life locally based on its understanding of local circumstances and the diverse needs of local people. This vision links well with national and sub regional agendas. Through effective community leadership the Council has adopted a shared approach with its partners to achieving common goals which are linked from the Community Strategy to the Corporate Plan and then beyond to service planning and individual targets. All this effort is supported by the Medium Term Financial Forecast which further assists the Council maintain focus on what are and are not priorities. Together with its key strategic partners the Council uses its knowledge and understanding well to develop clear ambitions and priorities.
- 6 The Council's engagement with the West of England Partnership is effective. It works constructively with the partnership on an appropriate long-term approach to tackling sub regional agendas. The Council has given direction to the North Somerset Partnership (NSP), the local strategic partnership. Political and managerial commitment to the partnership is high and partners from a range of sectors are engaged. The Council has concentrated on building the capacity of many of its partners, especially in the voluntary and business sectors.
- 7 The Council with its partners are focussing on tackling the identified housing needs and health inequalities in the district. To date the Council has achieved some improvements in tackling these agendas, such as with the housing and community developments in Locking Castle. It has ambitious plans in place to deliver further improvement in Weston-super-Mare, working sub regionally as well as locally. A range of major long-term developments are now beginning, leading to a major increase in the scale of activity. This links with the overall ambitions for the area to increase employment opportunities, improve educational attainment, health, housing, the environment and reduce crime and so improve the quality of life for all.
- 8 The Council is better placed to respond to major issues due to improvements to corporate systems. It has focused its energies on improving under-developed processes and strengthening corporate capacity to help achieve its priorities. The human resources strategy supports workforce development including employment opportunities for people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and people with disabilities. Better systems for financial reporting and management are being introduced and new technologies are assisting the Council achieve improved customer access. There are recent improvements in risk management and more planned for procurement to improve the achievement of value for money. These improvements assist the Council's organisational effectiveness and help achieve local priorities.

- 9 Managerial leadership is strong. Senior managers demonstrate purposeful and effective leadership and an increased focus on achieving value for money, which has been under-developed. The Council has realised year on year efficiency savings and now has plans in place to ensure it continues to secure value for money. Finances are tight, but budget planning and financial control are helping release resources targeted to achieve priorities. However, councillor capacity is under-developed. Councillors are committed to providing improvements for local people and have engaged in setting priorities for future improvement. But councillor engagement in managing their own development is limited and the contribution they make to performance management is variable and adding little value.
- 10 The Council has achieved important outcomes for local people through improving key services. Educational attainment, planning, adult social care and regeneration have all improved. It has developed well the change agenda for children and young people. Environmental improvements in the town centre and sea front of Weston-super-Mare are helping stimulate the local economy. The physical regeneration of Portishead including community facilities and housing developments has improved the environment and quality of life in this northern part of the district. However, there are still further improvements required in key areas. For example the Council recognise there is more to do to in providing affordable housing in the district. Its plans to tackle health inequalities with key partners are not yet finalised and the Council lacks a strategic approach to responding to the needs and aspirations of older people.
- 11 Good partnership initiatives are evident in a number of areas although some of the partnerships have been more effective than others in delivering improvements for local people. With its partners the Council is securing improved outcomes for local people in reducing vehicle crime and anti-social behaviour and improved road safety, although it is starting from a low base in some areas. It is targeting resources and efforts to areas of highest need. It has tackled poor landlord management effectively for houses in multiple occupation and has recently opened the For All Healthy Living Centre in an area of deprivation in the south of Weston-super-Mare. In addition the Council's approach to equality and diversity is improving. There is a clear commitment to recognising diversity and building stronger communities through effective engagement. For example, its community learning plans prioritise tackling the needs of local deprived and low income people with limited employment prospects and of those from BME communities. The Council's engagement with targeted and BME communities and those at risk of exclusion across the district is beginning to find ways of meeting their needs.
- 12 Performance management is improving through the application of the corporate framework. Strategies and plans link well with local and corporate ambitions. Close performance monitoring has led to service improvements in some areas. However, monitoring outcomes is under-developed and the Council does not set targets prior to the completion of projects with a view to evaluating their success post completion. Projects are evaluated after completion with a view to establishing long term plans. It is also taking steps to improve project management and to link service and financial planning and monitoring.

Areas for improvement

- 13 The Council needs to develop a corporate and strategic approach to meeting the needs and aspirations of older people which goes beyond health and social care for the more vulnerable elderly population.
- 14 Councillors need to make better use of performance information to challenge performance and drive improvement.
- 15 Councillors need appropriate targeted development programmes which they support and which reflect meeting their needs to achieve strong community leadership including the role and responsibilities of the policy and scrutiny function.
- 16 There needs to be a strong corporate focus on ensuring the Council has access to the appropriate skills, support and resources to deliver its key priorities. For example, it is engaged in many local and sub regional partnership agendas and will be driving forward major developments on economic regeneration and affordable housing. Maintaining clear priorities and good communication among partners will be vital elements in helping to deliver on these ambitious projects.
- 17 The Council needs to ensure it secures value for money in all its activities including procurement and should seek to monitor and report these measures as part of the performance monitoring framework received by Councillors.

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	2
	Performance management	2
What has been achieved?	Achievement	2
Overall corporate assessment score**		2
*Key to scores		
1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance		
2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance		
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well		
4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly		

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

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

Context

The locality

- 18 The district of North Somerset is in the south west of England and covers 274 square kilometres with approximately 17 kilometres of coastline. It is bordered to the north by Bristol and to the east and south by the Mendip Hills. It is predominantly a rural area with many small parishes and villages. It contains four towns which are Weston-super-Mare, Clevedon, Portishead and Nailsea. Almost two thirds of the area is Green Belt or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The area's main communications are provided by the M5 motorway, an inter-city rail link, a major sea port and an international airport.
- 19 The population of North Somerset is increasing and is now 193,000 (ONS 2004). This is projected to grow by a further eight per cent over the next decade. During the summer months the district's population increases with an estimated five million visitors to the area. Two thirds of the area is rural with 70 per cent of its population living in its four main towns, of which 40 per cent live in Weston-super-Mare. It is a densely populated area with 516 people per square kilometre. This is over twice the regional density.
- 20 Overall the district is generally prosperous, particularly in the north, and has some of the wealthiest communities in the country. In 2005 unemployment stood at approximately 1 per cent. In contrast there are some small but significant pockets of deprivation, some of which are in the central and south wards of Weston-super-Mare. These areas fall into the bottom 10 per cent of the most deprived areas in the country. They suffer from high levels of health inequality, significant levels of unemployment and crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 21 North Somerset's school age population is expected to grow over the next seven years due to significant planned residential development in Weston-super-Mare and Portishead. Twenty-two per cent of North Somerset's population is under the age of 19. However, the proportion of 16-24 year olds is lower than the national average and this partly reflects that many young people leave the area as higher education and employment is not locally available.
- 22 The population is predominantly White British (Census 2001). Numbers of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and from other cultures are small. In total they account for approximately three per cent of the population. This is lower than the regional average of 4 per cent. Children and young people from BME communities form four per cent of the school population. The largest ethnic group is people who identified themselves as White other (people from any white community other than British) in the 2001 Census.

- 23** People aged 65 years and over account for almost 20 per cent of the population. This is higher than the national average of 16 per cent and the regional average of 19 per cent. There are significant health inequalities within the area. People from the more affluent parts of the district can expect to live over 13 years longer than those living in the most deprived wards.
- 24** Many North Somerset residents are highly skilled and represent the fifth most educated workforce in the South West. Incomes are highest in the north of the district around Nailsea and Backwell, and lowest in Weston-super-Mare. A significant proportion of the working population (36 per cent) commute out of the area daily as there are not enough appropriate job opportunities locally. This puts huge pressure on sub regional roads and rail services. Currently the public sector is the largest employer in the district. In addition there are 800 community and voluntary organisations providing services such as high levels of drug treatment and opportunities for employment and skills development.
- 25** The nature of the area's economy and demographics means that the contrasts within the district are sharply reflected in the housing market. Overall North Somerset has better affordability in housing than the sub regional average when compared with Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset. However, this mainly reflects the situation in Weston-super-Mare, Clevedon and Yatton. The ability to buy is lower in Portishead as house prices are higher. The largest elements of housing need across the district are new households, who are unable to buy and family homes of three or more bedrooms.

The Council

- 26** North Somerset Council is a unitary council, created in 1996. It comprises 61 councillors representing 36 wards, elected every four years. At the time of the inspection, the political balance was: 23 Liberal Democrat, 25 Conservative, 9 Labour, 3 independent and Green and 1 vacancy. Following the elections in May 2003 the Council had a joint Liberal Democrat and Conservative administration. The joint administration ended in October 2005 and, up to the time of the inspection, the council has had a Liberal Democrat administration. The structure follows the leader and cabinet/executive model.
- 27** The Executive consists of the Leader of the Council and seven councillors from the largest group. Each of the executive members, including the Leader, has portfolio responsibilities. The portfolios are economic development; housing and community safety; adult services; children and young people; environment and community; finance and resources; people and property; and planning and transport.
- 28** There are seven policy and scrutiny panels, chaired by opposition councillors. These cover health, adult services and housing, children and young people, strategic planning and economic development, environmental services, community services and finance and performance.

- 29 The Corporate Management Team provides senior management support to the Executive. It consists of the Chief Executive and four strategic directors responsible for adult social services and housing; children and young people; development and environment; and finance and resources.
- 30 The North Somerset Partnership (NSP), the local strategic partnership, developed the district's first community strategy in 2003. Following consultation the revised strategy was adopted in November 2004. The next review is planned for 2006/07. The Council's strategic aims with underlying priorities until 2007 are identified in 'Aiming for excellence - Corporate Plan 2004-2007'.
- 31 The Council's local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) with the Government runs from 2003 until 2006. The target areas were negotiated based on local views expressed through consultation and intelligence linked with the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities. A Local Area Agreement (LAA) is planned to begin in April 2007.
- 32 The Council employs approximately 7,000 staff across all services, with two thirds of them working in schools. It has a net budget for 2005/06 of £199.2 million. The capital programme is £112.6 million over the next two years between 2006 and 2008. This includes for example, £5.5 million to be used to secure match funding to enable the Council to facilitate 400 new homes over the next three years. The average council tax per band D equivalent is £1,148, a rise of 4 per cent from the previous year.

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

Ambition

- 33 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. It has a broad vision underpinned with clear and challenging ambitions for what it wants to achieve for the area. These are based on its shared understanding with partners of local needs. Extensive consultation with local communities, the voluntary and business sector and town and parish Councils has informed this understanding. This has led to improvements in services, for example, the development of the For All Healthy Living Centre on a deprived estate in Weston-super-Mare. It consults in many ways with partners and the community and its strategic approach to consultation and communication is developing well. The Council understands well local needs and challenges.
- 34 The Council provides effective leadership of and support to the North Somerset Partnership (NSP), the local strategic partnership. The district's first community strategy was developed in 2003 and revised in 2004. The Council's ambitions and the community strategy link well and are agreed with local partners. Examples of this are work with the Director of Public Health of the Primary Care Trust on lessons learnt from the health and wellbeing delivery partnership and the development of nine community strategy themes. A further review is planned for 2006/07 to reflect the findings of further consultation and national developments in children's services and health services. The current strategy sets out a long-term vision that:

'North Somerset is a place of safe, healthy, thriving communities. By working together we aim to improve the quality of life and well-being of all, creating an inclusive, sustainable district, where local people have a real say in the decisions that affect them and future generations.'

The community strategy themes are communities and people; community safety; culture, leisure and recreation; economy and employment; environment; health and well-being; housing; learning and skills; and transport. The NSP has an independent chair. The community strategy has clear specific short and medium term strategies and targets linked to achieving specific actions for each theme. The Council is well placed to deliver its ambitions for the community as it has developed ambitions which are shared by its partners.

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- 35** Partnership working is effective. The NSP can demonstrate it has delivered on targets set in the Community Strategy for each delivery partnership. Each delivery partnership has developed action plans for every priority theme area to help maintain focus and monitor performance. Efforts have focused on building the delivery partnerships in relation to agreed priorities. Some of the partnerships have been more effective than others in delivering improvements for local people. For example, the community safety delivery partnership is very effective in reducing town centre anti-social behaviour and introduced successful measures to manage the night-time economy and the sale of alcohol. However, the culture delivery partnership has yet to achieve improvements that would be recognised by local people. Working effectively with others the Council is achieving more than working alone.
- 36** The Council's ambitions are challenging and well developed. Local intelligence and regional demographic information have shaped the development of the ambitions along with locally expressed views. Economic regeneration is seen by the Council and its partners as a major focus for the development of a cohesive community. One way it is tackling this is through its emerging economic development strategy. This is primarily focused on tackling the population growth forecast and the Council's own ambition to increase local prosperity. The draft strategy links local and regional policies and strategies, including the community strategy, the Weston Vision statement, the West of England economic strategy and the Regional Economic strategy for the South West of England. It provides an economic profile of the area including population growth, housing, transport and infrastructure. Views from stakeholders and partners are included. The Council's understanding of community needs is informing the delivery of the strategy. For example, it is linking its understanding of needs to deliver adult learning under the new regional arrangements of the Learning and Skills Council for the West of England's Community Learning Strategy. Its community learning plans prioritise tackling the needs of local deprived and low income people, with limited employment prospects and of those from BME communities. In this way the council is tackling the needs of many people at risk of exclusion and disadvantage and is ensuring it is able to deliver sustainable prosperity for its communities.
- 37** The targets in the Council's corporate plan focus well on achieving the locally agreed ambitions. The Council's own strategic aims and underlying priorities are identified in 'Aiming for excellence - Corporate Plan 2004-2007'. These aims are:
- promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all;
 - enhancing health and well-being;
 - protecting and improving the environment;
 - building safer communities;
 - increasing prosperity; and
 - ensuring continuous improvement.

The Council aims to work with the NSP to meet these local area priorities and improve the quality of life in the area.

- 38** The Council and its partners work well to identify local views. It has carried out major consultation in partnership for example, with the NSP and its delivery partnerships. Examples include consultation on the joint Local Transport Plan, the Weston Area Development Framework and the Single Plan for Children and Young People. Two recent examples of this joint working are where the outcomes of a health inequalities conference being shared through the appropriate delivery partnership and feedback with the public following consultation on the waste strategy. Sharing outcomes from consultation helps the Council and its partners maintain a shared understanding of needs.
- 39** The Council is taking effective steps to engage local people in the development of its ambitions and improvement plans for the area. Consultation findings are used effectively to inform its strategies and plans. For example service improvements, such as health inequalities work, introducing flexible respite arrangements and an emergency support line for carers, improving home care for older people and waste minimisation initiatives have all resulted from consultation and effective user engagement. Communication with local people is improving, especially through a regular council produced magazine. In this way the Council can demonstrate how it effectively listens and responds to local views.
- 40** Community leadership is effective with political and managerial commitment to deliver the ambitions for the area. The Council has demonstrated good community leadership through its support for the West of England Partnership. Its leadership of this strategic partnership has been positive and helped to inform key sub regional strategies and plans, such as on developing a joint Local Transport Plan and assessing housing needs. This means the Council is responding well to regional and sub regional agendas.
- 41** Ambitions are based on a clear understanding of the needs of targeted communities and informed by user feedback and engagement. Specific targets for community needs have been identified by consulting groups including those traditionally regarded as harder to reach. For example, it is engaging with the Youth Parliament, the youth participation network, BME communities, people with disabilities and gypsy and traveller communities. The Council recognises that it needs to communicate better with local people on some key concerns and has plans in place to do so. It has not yet identified and engaged with the needs of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. However, there is a clear commitment to recognising diversity and building stronger communities through effective engagement.

Prioritisation

- 42 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. Its work with partners and local communities has led it to identify 22 clear priorities which underpin its corporate ambitions. The priorities reflect both local challenges and national themes including education, environment, jobs, crime, health and housing. The priorities are the result of extensive consultation with residents and stakeholders, for example, a tenants' survey measuring satisfaction and the Strategic Schools Forum. Progress on delivering the priorities is monitored against targets set out in the corporate plan.
- 43 The Community Strategy is clearly supported by the Corporate Plan, service plans and individual targets. The Council has also used the Local Public Service Agreement to further strengthen the delivery of the agreed priorities and maintain focus on what matters most to local people including tackling areas of greatest need. The Medium Term Financial Forecast is also used to assist the Council maintain focus on the priorities and ensures the effective use of scarce resources. The Council can demonstrate there is a clear thread that links corporate and community targets to the allocation of resources.
- 44 The priorities are driven by recognition of the need to respond to identified local views, national agendas and regional and sub regional priorities. For example, local GCSE attainment levels were lower in Weston-super-Mare than across the rest of the district. In response the Council has identified improving achievement levels in the town as a priority within its ambition to promote lifelong learning for all. Access and choice in housing is a priority as the availability of affordable housing is a major local challenge. The Council's response to this agenda is to focus their efforts on continued joint working between housing and the planning services and sub regional partnerships. For example, the Council has set up an affordable housing delivery group to maximise use of available land and funding. With an increased focus on this priority the Council is better placed to tackle significant local issues.
- 45 Ambitious strategies and plans are in place to tackle key priorities. For example, it is planning to tackle longstanding economic and housing conditions and regenerate Weston-super-Mare in a sustainable way with partners. The Weston Area Development Framework seeks to link town centre regeneration with a programme of urban expansion providing new employment, housing and community development at key sites outside the town. This is supported by the major plans for the redevelopment of the former Tropicana seafront site for a business and cultural complex and work has already started on the development of housing on Knightstone Island. The Council is responding well through these planned approaches to major local issues.

- 46 Resources are allocated to priorities to ensure their delivery. In December 2005 the Executive considered how the Council should invest in priority areas for improvement, for example, allocating £35 million to education and lifelong learning, £1.6 million on fostering and additional support services for adults with disabilities and £7.5 million on protecting and improving the environment. It also ensured that the needs of its diverse communities and those at risk of disadvantage were considered when planning services. The Council has also taken difficult decisions about what are not priorities, for example, in the 2005/06 financial year, expenditure on support roles such as social services administration and information technology was reduced by £0.9 million as well as £4.1 million coming from efficiency savings and increased income from car parking and community facilities. With this focus the Council is ensuring that the allocation of resources meets its local priorities and is targeted to areas of greatest concern.
- 47 The Council is improving its engagement with local diverse communities through a variety of mechanisms and approaches. It has strengthened its relationship with the local Race Equality Council and is part funding an advisory post with the police and Primary Care Trust (PCT). As a result the Council is now working with community leaders, for example, in the Greek Cypriot community. It has set up a range of stakeholder consultation events and meetings, such as with gypsy and traveller communities, in order to learn more about the different communities' needs. For example, the Council has established the '4 Estates Forum' to tackle the needs and aspirations of communities living in the most deprived areas in Weston-super-Mare. This improved understanding means the Council is becoming better placed to meet the needs of the diverse communities.
- 48 Consultation informs local priorities. The NSP understands, agrees and adopts key strategic objectives in consultation with the Council. Many of the delivery partnerships are clear about the challenges and targets to be achieved. For example, objectives to deliver employment opportunities and influencing the economic strategy are identified as a priority area. Consultations with local businesses and through the West of England partnership have already taken place and are supporting the delivery of these objectives. The partnership is mature and members are able to share the key objectives, agree on the major challenges facing the sub region and do so in a consultative and supportive way. This approach assists the partnership take forward its agenda and better support local communities and vulnerable groups.
- 49 The Council is listening well to the views of local people to improve access to services. The customer access programme is designed to deliver Gateways to Council services through libraries and other venues. Take up at the first Gateway in the For All Healthy Living Centre on the Bourneville estate is steady and Gateways are due to be available in all libraries shortly. However, the Council is at an early stage in ensuring the customer access programme meets the needs of the diverse communities in the area. Although the programme has been informed by consultation with some target communities, few improvements have happened yet. The new web-site is designed to be accessible by people with additional needs and customer care training is being rolled out to all staff. In this way the Council is improving access to services at a local level but has some way to go to ensure services are accessible to all communities.

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

- 50** The Council has taken effective steps to achieve its Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) targets linked with its priorities. The target areas were decided upon following local consultation using a MORI survey. Many of the targets were delivered jointly with partner organisations. This has allowed the Council to address improvements that both residents and partners would recognise. Thirteen of the 30 performance targets are on track to meet their stretch performance in priority areas and six more are due to attain the minimum required target. Successes include improving Key Stage 3 attainment, more older people being helped to live independently at home, improving the condition of non-principal roads and reducing vehicle crime. This focus allows the Council and partners to focus on delivering priorities to improve the quality of life for residents.
- 51** Overall customer satisfaction with the Council is below average. It was only 55 per cent in 2003/04 when adjusted for deprivation compared with the national median of 60 per cent. This places the Council well below the top performing councils nationally who demonstrate 65 per cent satisfaction. The Council has recognised a link between how satisfied local people are and how well informed they consider themselves to be. As a result it has invested significantly in improving consultation and communication with local people. It has redesigned the Council's magazine and held specific events to engage target groups, such as older people. It has refreshed its citizens' panel to ensure it continues to be representative of the local population. The Council has improved its mechanisms to engage local people in its decision-making.

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

Capacity

- 52 The Council's approach to capacity is adequate. In recent years it has focused its energies to build its organisational capacity and systems. As a result the Council is now better placed to continue tackling major local issues of economic regeneration, crime and housing. It recognises the need to demonstrate strategic and cross cutting leadership. The results of organisational change are beginning to be evident in the achievement of some improved outcomes for local people, for example physical regeneration projects.
- 53 Managerial leadership is strong. The Corporate Management Team is clear about their responsibilities and has a strategic focus to support policy decisions. Its leadership allows the coherent management of cross cutting areas, such as an increasing focus on achieving value for money. This maintains an effective organisational focus on improving performance in key areas.
- 54 The Council works well with others to achieve common objectives linked to local priorities, focusing on what is most important to local people. For example the award of £3.6 million from the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund will be used to support the work of the '4 Estates Forum' to improve public spaces in deprived areas. Other examples of working well with partners include working with the local PCT on the development of the children's centres, with the Shaw Trust on formerly council-owned care homes and with registered social landlords (RSLs) on affordable housing. It is building community capacity, for example, by providing capital funding for development of the Badger centre, which enabled voluntary sector partners to lever in external funding. Support for the Strategic Housing Forum, the housing delivery partnership of the NSP, is given through regular meetings between the chair of the forum and council officers to develop knowledge and understanding of wider agendas. In these ways the Council is taking steps to enhance its capacity to deliver priority improvements and is demonstrating effective community leadership.

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- 55** The organisational culture has a clear focus on improving the quality of life for local people. Morale is good. Staff satisfaction has increased and the staff survey results show staff feeling valued, informed and involved. The Council has achieved level 2 of the Local Government Standard for Equalities and has worked hard to ensure its workforce is representative of the local population in terms of ethnicity. A disabled staff forum has been set up and action taken to increase recruitment and retention. Due to these positive steps employment of staff with disabilities has increased in line with the wider community profile. The Council has also taken the opportunity to work with partners to identify responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act and also to encourage the employment of people with disabilities. These improvements have secured better employment opportunities for groups at risk of disadvantage.
- 56** Staff support systems have improved. The new Human Resources strategy supports workforce development and planning. The Council has a management competency framework in place to support the continuing development of managerial leadership. Sickness absences have reduced. It has successfully tackled 'Single Status' following a pay review. Workforce planning is developing with a dedicated team in place. The Council has revised its approaches to tackling recruitment of key workers resulting in the employment of social workers from abroad. Training and development programmes focus on equalities and diversity and developing key skills to deliver improvements. For example, the Council recognises its section 17 responsibilities and provides appropriate training for staff.
- 57** Corporate systems are operating well. Financial management and reporting arrangements and the use of ICT are effective. It has secured significant external funding targeted to delivering major improvements. Its understanding of how well it is securing value for money has been under-developed, but it is tackling this. The Council is working to deliver services in different ways. It recognises the benefits of e-government and has improved customer contact arrangements. For example, customer contact arrangements in Care Connect and Streets and Open Spaces. It is improving access to Council services including the new customer access programme. Its communication strategy, which addresses equality and diversity issues, is improving the range of information available to the public. The Council also employs external skills and consultants on specialist matters, such as asbestos removal. Neighbourhood based streets and open spaces teams focus resources better on improving the condition of local areas. These approaches are making effective use of resources to ensure the Council has sufficient capacity to deliver its priorities.

- 58 Steps taken to develop key support systems to strengthen the delivery of priorities are at the early stages, but showing some results. The Council has focused its attention on improving in these areas. It now has a procurement strategy with supporting guidance and dedicated staff. This is leading to some discounts on purchased items, supporting the delivery of value for money. The Council is improving risk management. Risk champions and regularly updated risk registers are in place with appropriate support mechanisms to help manage risks. An additional team of officers dedicated to value for money has been established to work alongside the procurement team to better support the Council secure efficiencies in the use of resources. Project management is supported by the use of external consultants and is being strengthened internally by monitoring from a Capital Board. Staff are widely involved in developing different ways of delivering services by, for example, using the Service assessment Model. These improvements strengthen the Council's organisational effectiveness to help achieve local priorities.
- 59 The Council has no up to date corporate asset management strategy which supports the delivery of corporate priorities. However, the Council has focused its efforts on property and asset management, securing agreement on an office accommodation strategy. This has led to accommodation improvements and a corporate approach to energy management.
- 60 Councillor capacity is not sufficiently developed. Councillors' engagement in their own development is limited with little ownership of training and development. There is no individual needs analysis leading to personal development plans to help develop councillors' leadership skills, policy and decision-making and to support the effective development of scrutiny functions. This contributes to the Council missing opportunities to better support its community leadership role and develop strong political leadership.
- 61 The Council's policy and scrutiny functions operate adequately. The scrutiny role has included involvement by members of the public. There are some examples of policy development task groups contributing to service improvement. For example, there are signs of improvement in the number and choice of foster carers available and improved support for foster families following a cross policy and scrutiny panel working group. The Environmental Services policy and scrutiny panel helped develop the Council's Municipal Waste Strategy highlighted by the Centre for Public Scrutiny as an effective example of scrutiny. However, councillors and officers have widely different views of the overall roles and effectiveness of the Policy and Scrutiny panels in challenging the Executive, linking with the champions' groups and engagement in policy work. Concerns are expressed about the variable and inconsistent use of policy and scrutiny to support decision-making. These issues pose a risk to the Council's organisational effectiveness and support for service improvements.

Performance management

- 62 The Council's approach to performance management is adequate. It has developed its approach and although the framework has been in existence for sometime the Council recognise there is more to do. The performance management framework links corporate and directorate strategies and plans with the community strategy through to service plans and individual appraisals. The Medium Term Financial Forecast, which has a three-year time horizon, is reviewed annually ensuring the Council maintains a focus on the corporate priorities when conflicting budgetary decisions are required. However, service and financial planning are not linked, but the Council plans to do so in 2006/07 to ensure resources continue to follow priorities. With its increasing commitment to performance management, the Council is strengthening its focus on achieving its priorities.
- 63 The Council is using performance information well to improve some under-performing and priority services. For example, it restructured its trading standards team in response to an analysis of crime data to support its work with partners on tackling local crime and disorder. By increasing the focus on performance monitoring throughout the organisation the Council is well placed to continue to improve key services.
- 64 Performance management arrangements with partners are developing, but are at an early stage. Data is shared between some partners, such as on community safety, and some partners have contributed data for the purpose of monitoring progress against the LPSA targets. The Council and its partners are beginning to use quality of life indicators to measure overall progress against the priorities of the community strategy. These headline indicators against each of the strategy's themes have been in place for a year, but the NSP is yet to analyse the initial findings. As a result the Council is not yet clear about the level of success it is having through working with others.
- 65 The Council is open to external evaluation, challenge and learning from others. It has responded positively to external assessments, such as inspection and Use of Resources assessment, and implemented changes as a result. For example, following the recent Use of Resources assessment, the Council has decided as a matter of priority to investigate the costs of securing care services and residential placements during 2006. In addition the Council has investigated notable practice in procurement and has used its learning to inform its actions. It uses such opportunities well to drive improvement.

- 66 Use of complaints to drive improvement is working well. In 2004/05 corporate complaints monitoring showed high levels of complaints in development control, revenues and benefits and streets and open spaces. In response the Council implemented a range of improvements, focusing on improving the speed and quality of response to applications and requests for services. The Council is not yet systematically evaluating the impact of its action so that it can be confident that they have tackled the identified issues as well as they could have. However, levels of satisfaction have increased and complaints reduced in the targeted services.
- 67 Performance monitoring arrangements are adequate. Arrangements are in place to help managers focus on priorities. For example, senior managers maintain a clear overview of performance, with the Corporate Management Team (CMT) reviewing further action reports on required remedial action. Performance monitoring reports are continually being improved to focus on headline performance and where performance is not on target. However, the Council has not been reviewing service and financial performance together to assess progress against key priorities and spend, but is doing so in 2006/07. Reports to councillors and managers are not routinely using service cost and quality information to assess if the Council is achieving value for money. Ensuring the strengthened focus on value for money, performance monitoring and the changes taking place to better support procurement the Council has positioned itself well to deliver its priorities and secure intended outcomes for local people.
- 68 Councillors use performance information inconsistently to drive improvement. For example, levels of constructive challenge and debate between councillors and officers using performance information are limited. Councillors express concerns about the volume and style of information they receive. In addition the Council is not using its scrutiny functions consistently to challenge and contribute to service improvement. As a result the Council is missing opportunities for councillors to challenge performance systematically and robustly and so drive improvement and assist with delivering its priorities.
- 69 Target setting is not always focused on measuring outcomes for local people, and is occasionally unrealistic. The Council is making reasonable progress in achieving its current targets, and aims to achieve with 71 per cent on target for 2005/06. However, there are few outcome focused measures of success against key corporate priorities. Key performance indicators are used to monitor progress against corporate priorities, but many of these are focused on monitoring outputs not outcomes. The Council has a strong understanding of the challenges it faces and engages in constructive dialogue with its partners and communities on how it will prioritise the available resources. However, this planning process is undermined in some areas by the lack of clear outcome measures of success. The Council recognises this and plans to tackle assessing progress on delivering local ambitions.

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

- 70** The Council does not systematically set outcome targets for projects prior to their completion in order to evaluate improvements and review their impact on the community post completion. For example, it does not know if major corporate projects, such as the For All Healthy Living Centre and The Campus, the shared school and community facilities at Locking Castle, have been successful in achieving intended aims. The Council is undertaking post completion reviews with stakeholders with an intention to establish long term development plans for the facilities. However, without developing clear outcome targets at the planning stage the Council and its partners cannot be clear about progress made and the effectiveness of actions to achieve priorities.
- 71** The Council is not capturing performance data for all sections of the community. It monitors complaints and compliments data by ethnicity, but not by age, sexuality or disability. Overall it only collects satisfaction data for the community as a whole, although it does collect tenant satisfaction data by ethnicity. The Council is working to ensure it has the necessary data to monitor the impact of its activity on BME communities and has plans to increase its capture of personal profile data. However, the current lack of available data by community group limits the Council's ability to monitor the impact of its activity on its communities.

What has been achieved?

- 72** Overall, the Council's performance in achieving outcomes against the national shared priorities is adequate. There is a mixed picture of achievement against its local and national priorities. It has achieved good improvements with partners in some areas. For example, cross cutting work with the employment sector, police, voluntary sector and health partners in providing services within the deprived wards of the district. The Council has been successful in improving some under-performing or priority services which are important to achieving its ambitions. For example, it has made good progress in education, planning and housing. Improving performance monitoring is helping to identify some successes from these and some demonstrate clear outcomes for local people.
- 73** As described earlier in prioritisation, the Council has clear priorities for improving the district based on a strong understanding of local need. Its priority to regenerate Weston-super-Mare town centre focuses on improving employment opportunities by attracting new businesses. The national shared priorities map against corporate priorities. Improving access to Council services is part of the Council's priority to deliver services through a customer-centred approach, taking advantage of new technologies and different ways of delivering services locally. The development of local Gateways to services is still at an early stage of development, but so far levels of take up and satisfaction are encouraging.
- 74** The Council has improved performance in some areas. It has made good progress in tackling the wider children's agenda through the creation of the children and young people's service. Adult social care has improved, with more older people being helped to live at home. Planning performance is high which supports the partnership between the private sector and the Council which in turn helps the delivery of the Council's economic regeneration strategy. Recycling is improving and streets and open spaces are maintained to a high standard. Successful initiatives have contributed to a reduction in some crime levels and employment opportunities for people from deprived communities.
- 75** Achievement in some areas is variable. The amount of waste collected is high and compares with the worst performing councils nationally. However, recently introduced waste minimisation initiatives show encouraging early results. The Council is improving its approach to delivering affordable housing, but recognises that more needs to be done. The Council is currently developing a strategy for older people and it does not yet have a complete and clear view of performance on its healthy living initiatives.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 76 The Council has a strong focus on promoting sustainability, access and choice in housing and has made these issues major themes of the community strategy and Council priorities. The development of an integrated strategic vision for sustainable communities and transport is progressing well. The Council and its partners have a strong understanding of the significant challenges they face in promoting and sustaining employment, the economy, appropriate housing and transport infrastructure and the environment. Comprehensive strategies are developing well and reflect the prioritisation given to partnership development and the external environment but not all are fully in place. Outcomes across this area are mixed.
- 77 The Council and its partners are working effectively to contribute to the long-term ambition of increasing prosperity. Unemployment levels are lower and average wage levels are higher when compared to the regional and national comparisons. The district has a variety of businesses across different sectors, but many employ less than ten people and there is a lack of larger employers. There are few high technology knowledge based industries compared to other areas in the sub-region. Highly skilled residents work outside the district, creating pressure on roads and transport. Some employment opportunities in the district are low paid and seasonal. As a result of this economic picture of the district, the Council, with its partners, recognise there is more to do to tackle its own priorities of increasing local job opportunities and reducing poverty.
- 78 However, there are some notable successes contributing to improving employment opportunities and regenerating areas of deprivation. The South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) awarded the Council £5 million out of a regional fund of £11 million to invest in Weston town centre and seafront. This has improved the public realm and attracted new retailers into the High Street. The innovative 'ready4work scheme' with the Weston Job Centre has helped over 110 people from disadvantaged areas and who were on long-term benefits into employment. The Council and Business West have helped over 330 new businesses to start up. After a year of operation 90 per cent of those businesses were still trading due to effective support mechanisms. Average wages are now higher than in neighbouring areas, but the local economy is not yet resilient. However, these approaches contribute to maintaining low unemployment levels.

- 79 The Council is taking steps towards achieving its priority of promoting sustainable transport. Most people travel to work by car and use of public transport in the district is significantly lower than the national average. Fewer people walk or cycle to work than the regional average but this is increasing. High levels of traffic congestion are a problem in the north of the district with so many residents commuting into Bristol and other areas. Improving public transport usage is a priority. This is to reduce levels of congestion on the district roads and the motorway and to provide comparable levels of access to those on low incomes and those who do not have access to a car. In 2004/05 the number of bus journeys made increased by 8 per cent. The Council has invested in rural and community transport schemes through funding from the national Rural Bus Challenge. Over 20 different community transport schemes cover some 90 per cent of the population. School travel is showing a slight reduction in the number of children travelling to school by car. The Council and their neighbouring unitary councils recognise there is more to do. A recently developed joint Local Transport Plan seeks to improve rural and urban access, choice and quality. Through its continued focus the Council is making progress towards achieving its targets for sustainable transport.
- 80 The Council has made some progress in the local housing market, especially linked to physical regeneration. In recent years it has worked well with the private sector to regenerate Portishead. Formerly a major industrial site, the area around the marina and waterfront is now transformed. There are now over 3,000 new homes with schools, cultural facilities and improved housing for elderly people. In addition, it has used its influence to bring forward some choice in housing types and locations to meet its corporate priority. It is working to release land for development, use section 106 agreements and attract significant inward investment from a range of partners. The Council exceeded its target for new homes built in the district in 2004/05, with 1,058 homes built. It is tackling homelessness and is improving the condition of private landlord properties through innovative work with partners on an accreditation scheme. This helps to support the planned future economic growth of the district.

- 81 The council together with the West of England Housing group have recognised and are taking action to tackle the significant affordable housing needs in the district. The Council is increasing the provision of affordable housing. It has set up an affordable housing delivery group to respond to this agenda with year on year improvement targets for delivery. The buoyancy of the sub regional housing market has meant there is a lack of good quality affordable housing. The Council and its partners are tackling this at sub regional levels with a strategy in place linking housing, supporting people and economic regeneration. In recent years the Council has delivered few affordable housing units, but this is significantly improving. The Council has revised its planning policy to include a requirement that all new housing developments over 15 units will provide 30 per cent affordable housing. The Council delivered 95 units in 2005/06 and has a programme for the next two years to deliver 300 new homes. It has recently transferred its housing stock to a not for profit housing organisation. This enables the Council to invest over £20 million from the transfer, with additional monies, in affordable housing in the next few years. Although these decisions are focused on providing better choice in housing for key workers and those on lower incomes the council recognise there remains a major challenge to continue to increase provision.
- 82 The Council and its partners have had some success in protecting and improving the environment. Its work on energy management is recognised externally as best practice. It has taken steps to deliver the benefits of more cost-effective waste management through the Municipal Waste Strategy which seeks to achieve £5 million efficiency savings over the next three years. Area based streets and open spaces teams have increased how the Council responds to reports of abandoned cars and standards of maintenance for streets and open spaces compares well with the best performing councils. This helps support environmentally sustainable communities.

Safer and stronger communities

- 83 The Council and its partners are making positive progress on achieving the local national ambition for safer and stronger communities. There are clear priorities to ensure the Council delivers its corporate ambitions for Community Safety. These include reducing substance misuse, violent crime and anti-social behaviour, improving road safety and promoting social inclusion. Following a crime and disorder reduction audit and consultation with stakeholders, the North Somerset Crime and Drugs Partnership launched a new Safer Communities strategy led by the Responsible Authorities Group (RAG). RAG includes representatives from the Council, police, probation, fire services and the PCT. The strategy supports the Council's priorities as well as having a focus on public reassurance. In support for promoting social inclusion the Council has met the requirements for Level 2 of the local government Equality Standard. This approach has brought a sharper focus to the Council's work on the safer and stronger communities' agenda.

- 84** Many local initiatives focusing on creating safer and stronger communities are effective. These include removing vandalised garages on the estates, the introduction of digital CCTV replacing the previous system and police community support officers. There are 32 Local Action Teams across the area whose community membership support crime reduction. These teams have had a positive impact on strengthening communities and public reassurance, through effective partnership work to help improve the quality of life. They are supported by other Council initiatives for example 'Community Speedwatch' which is a camera and video loan scheme so that individuals can film and report criminal action to the police. The Bobby van visits vulnerable people to assess how crime-proof their homes are and to increase awareness of personal safety. Compared to the previous year violent offences reported in 2005/06 are down by 13 per cent, against an increase in national statistics and domestic burglary is down 12 per cent. Local people are being better supported by the Council and its partners, this helps identify the causes of crime and helps manage the fear of crime.
- 85** Work with young people shows a reduction in re-offending rates. There are many effective initiatives targeting young people at risk of offending. The Youth Offending Team (YOT) works well using a comprehensive package of interventions including specific interventions for young people with learning disabilities. Supervised juveniles now have better access to education, training and employment when compared to national statistics and local residents support restorative justice schemes.
- 86** Effective local partnership initiatives are reducing anti-social behaviour. Multi agency working at operational level is good among the police, youth and housing services, the PCT and drug rehabilitation units. Preventative activities such as reducing truancy have reduced the Anti-Social Behaviour Orders placed on young people. Designing out crime has also been successful. For example, traffic calming measures along the Weston-super-Mare sea front and a redesigned car park in Nailsea has reduced car racing at night. Such approaches work well in ensuring targeted and effective action.
- 87** Innovative action has reduced levels of anti-social behaviour in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) in Weston-super-Mare. The Council and its partners analysed data on levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in HMOs. This was used to support 'Operation Jupiter', a multi agency initiative targeting the top 20 problem HMOs. As a result, additional support is now available for people entering and leaving drug and alcohol misuse treatment. This initiative has shown the benefits of a multi agency targeted approach to poor landlord management and to provide support for vulnerable people.

- 88 A number of effective measures link well the development of the night-time economy with community safety. The Council has responded well to the new licensing responsibilities and gained the support of the Vintners Association. Initiatives including a 'Best Bar None' scheme which promotes responsible management of licensed premises which includes not selling alcohol to underage drinkers. A street safe bus initiative helps people who get into difficulties after an evening out and work with the police has reduced the sale of alcohol in shops to young people. The impact of these initiatives has been positive in providing effective support for young people and those in potentially vulnerable situations.
- 89 The Council and its partners are focusing effectively on reducing drug and alcohol misuse and associated crime. The North Somerset community safety and drug action team are successfully implementing the National Drug Strategy locally. As a result of their work there are now more people receiving treatment for drug and alcohol misuse. COSMIC is a project aimed at supporting children and young people, whose parents and carers abuse alcohol and drugs, with a clear prevention and protection agenda. The Youth Service provide a number of training packs for use in youth clubs and settings to support young people making informed choices.
- 90 Road safety measures by the Council and its partners have reduced the number of people killed or seriously injured on the road. Joint work on identifying road hot spots has led to introductions of speed cameras in areas where they would have most impact. The Council has a target to reduce by 40 per cent the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents by 2010. Recent performance trends show an encouraging reduction but it is too early to judge whether the target will be achieved.
- 91 Many targeted initiatives have improved local perceptions of safety. Improvements to Council owned houses, such as installing lights on front and back doors, have increased people's perception of their own safety at home. Outside space is well managed which also helps promote feeling safe. A local accreditation scheme for landlords and tenants promotes responsible management, with a clear focus on ensuring residents are safe. This has been supported by a treatment accreditation scheme for those who are needing support for drug and alcohol problems. This scheme has received widespread praise and national recognition. The Council has worked hard to ensure a comprehensive set of measures has been put in place to deal with the issues. This has had positive outcomes for the vulnerable groups using the services, better retention in the schemes and as a consequence has also helped reduce crime figures across the district.
- 92 The Council is improving its approach to domestic violence. It has increased the number of refuge places it provides and supports. It has appointed a dedicated co-ordinator. It has developed an education pack and established a help line. However, the outcome of these initiatives in terms of the impact they are having in meeting the level of need is unknown.

- 93 The Council has put in place sound arrangements to implement the Civil Contingencies Act. Emergency situations are supported by a team of Council officers and the RAG. There is a comprehensive training programme in place with clear response scenarios for a number of identified risks. There are agreed community protocols in place for varying risks with schools and residential and nursing homes. Schools have risks assessments which are specific to their needs and cover internal school responses and external risks. Business continuity for the Council is in place and it promotes business continuity to others, such as local businesses. There is regional communication across the emergency planning officers as well as through the RAG.
- 94 The Council, with its partners, are being successful in reducing crime. Currently, crime rates appear higher than comparable authorities although the basis for this is under review. Actions taken are resulting in crime level reductions. In 2004/05, 60 per cent of all crime in the district occurred in Weston-super-Mare. Targeted partnership initiatives, such as 'Operation Jupiter', 'Street SafeBus' and PCSOs, contributed to a 16 per cent reduction in violent crime in the town during December 2005 to March 2006. Such an approach contributes to communities feeling safer.

Healthier communities

- 95 The Council and its partners are focussing their efforts on tackling the health inequalities in the district. Data is collected to measure the impact of healthy living initiatives on BME communities, and performance measures for the local community as a whole have been agreed and shared with partners. Most services to tackle health inequalities for children and young people are good. However, although overall ambitions are clear for enhancing health and well being, and performance measures have been identified, the range of supporting targets is not yet comprehensive. The full impact of some health and well-being initiatives is therefore unknown. At present the Council and its partners do not yet have a complete and clear view about the level of success they are having in promoting health and well being.
- 96 Partnership working with the local health community is strong. The draft health equalities strategy is being finalised and is based on an understanding of the needs of the local population. Although the strategy is not resourced, partners already have aligned and joint budgets in a number of areas, for example, for Sure Start and the For All Healthy Living Centre. This centre is based within a deprived area and is designed to act as a focal point for local community life. It provides a range of services to support local needs, such as giving access to a PCT employed doctor, employment services, an ecumenical church and childcare facilities. Targeted services are co-located to maximise access, such as at the Children's Centre on the Coronation estate. There are a range of services provided in partnership to assist people stop smoking. These initiatives demonstrate effective joint working at strategic and operational levels.

- 97 Targeted activities promote good health and well-being in children and young people. These include some services aimed at increasing physical activity in children which is a local PSA target. There has been a reduction in teenage pregnancies linked to a comprehensive range of sexual health services that are accessible, including in rural areas. These are well thought of by young people. Better children's services at the hospital include a dedicated children's area in the accident and emergency unit. Prevention and health improvements are supported by a wide range of good family support services that can be accessed flexibly. The development of these initiatives has been informed by a range of partners' data. These initiatives are appropriate to improve the long-term health of local young people.
- 98 Services targeted to the needs of all vulnerable groups across the district are limited mainly to health care at home. Care Connect provide access to a range of services for local people who contact them. There are very limited delayed transfers of care in the acute hospital, although there is an agreement with the Western Area Health Trust so any reimbursement grant is used to develop community services. At present resources and improvements are targeted at those areas in greatest need and further co-location of services planned to expand provision.
- 99 The Council and its partners are working well to tackle the health needs of targeted communities, such as the gypsy and traveller population and adults with learning disabilities. A worker has been appointed to ensure that adults with learning disabilities and difficulties have annual health checks to maximise health and well being. Lottery funding has been secured to increase consultation and access to services for the BME population. Work is in place to reduce racial inequalities including in health. A credit union is also in place to give access to ethical banking. In these ways the Council and its partners are improving how they can respond to the needs of communities at risk of exclusion.
- 100 Approaches to reducing drug and alcohol misuse are effective. The Drug Alcohol Action team have a comprehensive plan in place to support local drug users. In addition the area has a number of private drug dependency units but these vary in quality and services offered. A locally developed accreditation scheme is being rolled out to support the units to improve both their quality of care and services. This has led to some early successes and improvements in provision.
- 101 The Council and its partners are taking positive steps to support local people with disabilities into employment. For example, the 'ready4work' scheme has targeted local people in receipt of incapacity and disability benefits to improve access to work and the well being of participants in the scheme. The Council also increased significantly its employment of people with disabilities. This provides effective support for local people who may otherwise be disadvantaged.

- 102** Access to decent social housing is linked well with supporting good health and well-being. The Council has focused its efforts on improving the housing stock over several years and has reduced the proportion of non decent homes from 33 per cent to 26 per cent over the last two years. This represents a 21 per cent reduction in the number of homes which are non decent. The recent transfer of its 6,200 homes to the not-for-profit North Somerset Housing organisation will enable further improvements to be made. In addition the decent homes standard will be met by 2010. The quality of social housing is improving for local people.

Older people

- 103** The Council and its partners do not have a comprehensive strategic approach to older people that goes beyond health and social care. One of the executive portfolios is for adult social care and part of this role is to try and ensure that older people's needs are addressed across service priorities. In addition there is an older people's champion and champion group who liaise with local services on behalf of the Council. However, there is a lack of clarity about these specific roles and responsibilities and how they link with partners and the community. There is no focus on the needs of older people outside of the context of adult social care.
- 104** The Council is beginning to develop its approach to engaging older people. There is engagement with a range of older people using existing forums, such as the citizens' panel and some focus groups. However, there is limited engagement of hard to reach groups, such as those from the BME communities and people aged between 50 to 65 years. The engagement is not structured or co-ordinated to maximise impact. It is unclear how the outcomes from these consultations are reflected in service improvement plans. As a result the Council and its partners cannot be confident that the needs and aspirations of older people are being adequately met.
- 105** Social care initiatives and projects are targeted to meet the needs of older people, including through voluntary and community groups. For example, these include work with the Department of Work and Pensions to ensure people are receiving the correct payments, day care provision, actions to improve the housing stock and improved routing of buses. However, this has not been a co-ordinated and strategic response based on older people's views and needs.
- 106** The recent Commission for Social Care and Inspection (CSCI) report of adult social care judged that social services provision served most people well and had promising capacity for improvement. Work with health partners in this area has clearly improved. There has been work to modernise social care provision as well as pooling and alignment of some budgets for mainstream health and social care. However, health and social care services are only used by approximately 15 per cent of the older people's population nationally. Locally only a limited amount of work has been done to provide long-term services that promote independence and wellbeing which reflect the needs and aspirations of the wider and growing population of older people.

Children and young people

- 107 North Somerset Council and its partners performance in this area is good overall. The Council's use of resources is good and it is moving resources toward areas of highest need and priority. The Council's youth service and youth offending team are good. Most children and young people are healthy and safe and those most at risk are well protected. Services to support children and young people are generally of good quality and are contributing toward positive outcomes.
- 108 The local strategic partnership has set out challenging ambitions in 24 priority areas within its Children and Young Peoples Plan. The Council has integrated its education, children's social care effectively at headquarters level. There is political support and commitment for improving outcomes for children and young people. At the time of the inspection, there was uncertainty about the future configuration of the PCT although the current coterminous arrangement assures a shared focus on the improvement agenda.
- 109 Management of the council's services for children are good overall. The Council and its partners have a good track record of achievement on priority areas. The overall capacity of the Council to meet its objectives for children's services is good.
- 110 The Council collaborates well with its partners in promoting a strong focus on children's health education and preventative programmes. There is practice evidence of good multi disciplinary work to assure healthy outcomes for children and young people. The joint approach of agencies to reduce the level of teenage pregnancy on the basis of recent data appears to be having a positive impact. Similarly CAMHS is providing a responsive and well regarded service.
- 111 Children and young people most at risk from abuse are well protected through good multi agency safeguarding arrangements. In practice thresholds of risk are not high though interagency understanding of eligibility for services varies between key professionals. For looked after children services work well together to plan and achieve good outcomes. Good progress has been made in developing placement choice but there is still a significant shortage of placements. For care leavers more needs to be done to ensure a wider range of suitable and affordable accommodation resources.
- 112 The Council contributes well toward a good strategy for childcare and early years' education. There are sufficient childcare places and the quality of nursery education is good. The overall quality of education provision is good and there is effective challenge and support for schools as well as effective support for pupil behaviour and attendance. The level of educational attainment in schools is good, though the proportion of care leavers with a qualification is below that found nationally.

- 113** There is good support to help children and young people to take personal responsibility and to contribute to their communities. The Council and its partners are successfully working together to reduce anti-social behaviour by young people and are beginning to reduce offending. Opportunities for children and young people's involvement in decision-making on issues which affect them are developing well.
- 114** The proportion of young people in education, employment or training is higher than the national average, including looked after children. Qualification outcomes for young people are good especially for the attainment of level 2 and 3 outcomes by 19. The achievement rates for young people on Education to Employment programmes are also good. Young people overall receive good advice support and guidance through the Connexions service. The Council is implementing a 14-19 strategy but more progress is required to broaden the range of vocational and work experience opportunities to young people. There is a shortage of suitable affordable accommodation for young people and the Council needs to do more to improve capacity in the area. Regeneration initiatives have not to date had significant impact in extending local employment for young people especially those who have low attainment or learning difficulties or disabilities.

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 North Somerset Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 6-17 March 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.