

Corporate Assessment Report

November 2006



Corporate Assessment

Wigan 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 Wigan Borough Council is performing strongly. It has a clear record of delivering cost effective services to local people. The borough has high levels of deprivation, including deep-seated pockets of inequalities, which set a challenging context for the agenda for change. The Council is addressing these challenges effectively.
- 6 The Council has a highly ambitious programme of improvement, which is based on a well-developed and clear understanding of local needs. Its vision is to create a place where people matter and can afford to live the life they want. The Council demonstrates a firm resolve to raise the aspirations of all local people and to improve their quality of life. The Council's ambitions for the borough are well understood and shared by staff, partners and the public. There is strong approval from a wide range of stakeholders of the work that the Council is doing.
- 7 Through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) the Council and partners are successfully tackling areas which reflect local and national priorities. The long-term vision for the community is clear. Councillors and officers provide impressive, visible and effective community leadership. The Council has used its well-developed understanding of local needs, and its aspiration to be an 'outstanding council', to formulate its priorities for improvement. This understanding has been translated into robust strategies and action plans which focus on addressing the issues of the most excluded and deprived communities. This focus has in turn resulted in appropriate increased investment in priority areas.
- 8 The Leader and Chief Executive demonstrate highly effective political and managerial leadership and are well respected by partners. The Council has further extended this leadership to influence the wider sub-regional and regional agendas in pursuing ambitious plans to gain maximum benefit for the borough.
- 9 The Council has built on its strong track record of providing good and improving services. In its move towards becoming an outstanding council, it has made structural and cultural changes which have resulted in an impressively positive attitude throughout the Council. Councillors and officers work well together. The Council has developed a strong financial position through sound financial management, and uses a range of innovative procurement approaches to ensure it maintains the capacity to deliver on its ambitions.
- 10 The Council is delivering good value for money and is continually working hard to improve on this. Overall, the Council's costs are lower than those of other similar councils. Performance is generally good and improving. The Council has clear arrangements in place to assess and review service performance, and make sure staff are aware of their responsibilities in this area.
- 11 The Council has a track record of a strong performance-driven culture. Well established systems monitor and manage its own and partners' performance. The Council is proactive in learning effectively from others and is enthusiastic about sharing its expertise with partners.

- 12 The Council is making good progress in achieving its ambitions for the borough, narrowing the gap between its performance and national averages in key areas. Progress in terms of economic regeneration and creating jobs has been excellent. Environmental and sports regeneration activity has contributed to improving quality of life. Outcomes for children and young people are good and generally improving.
- 13 Neighbourhood renewal activity is resulting in positive outcomes, with successes in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and promoting community cohesion. The Council's approach to adult services, including older people's services, is well co-ordinated and has made an impact on the lives of vulnerable people.
- 14 With limited evidence of comparative improvement in health, the Council recognises that challenges remain in terms of equalising the quality of life across the borough itself and raising aspirations. However, indicators in a number of key areas are positive, including reduced mortality rates (although at lower rate than nationally), cessation of smoking, increased physical activity, reduced alcohol and substance misuse, and more healthy eating.
- 15 The Council has more actively challenged previous slow progress in reducing household waste, promoting recycling and improving street cleanliness. The pace of change has improved significantly in the past 18 months and there is a more joined-up approach to tackling 'crime and grime' at a neighbourhood level, resulting in improvements in targeted areas.
- 16 The Council has worked hard to ensure that it has appropriate plans in place to continue with its improvement agenda. Plans are generally shaped around and reflect the various needs and preferences of many of the diverse communities and interest groups that the Council serves. However, it recognises that there is more to do to ensure that it is meeting the needs of all local communities.

Areas for improvement

- 17 The Council is currently reviewing the links between the township forums and the community networks to achieve a closer alignment of work, especially with regard to black and minority ethnic (BME) networks. The Council needs to develop a neighbourhood management model through community engagement and empowerment, including further development of the township forums, to build capacity within neighbourhoods to deliver the appropriate services at a local level.
- 18 Following the review of waste management, the Council should finalise its longer-term action plans to ensure that it has the capacity to meet its targets in priority areas and demonstrate value for money across the whole service.
- 19 Although transport links are good nationally and regionally, there is major congestion locally on routes across the borough. Community transport and 'ring and ride' schemes have received variable feedback about flexibility and coverage. The Council should decide the appropriate actions it needs to take to in the short and medium term, to ensure that it meets the access needs of all local people.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	4
	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
Overall corporate assessment score**		4
*Key to scores		
1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance		
2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance		
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well		
4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly		

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

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

Context

The locality

- 20 Wigan borough is part of the Greater Manchester conurbation, in the North West of England, midway between Manchester and Liverpool. Two-thirds of the borough, which covers an area of 19,000 hectares, is open land and much of it is green belt. Transport links are good nationally and regionally but weak locally, with major congestion on routes across the borough.
- 21 Census figures in 2001 show that the population of the area is 305,400 and relatively stable. In 2001, 1.3 per cent of the population were from ethnic minority communities; however, the arrival of asylum seekers, refugees and - in recent months - economic migrants means that this proportion has increased slightly. The age structure of the population is relatively young, with more children and young people than the national and regional averages. The area is diverse and incorporates 14 small towns and villages, as well as the larger towns of Wigan and Leigh. Each settlement retains a strong sense of local identity.
- 22 The local economy was originally built around textiles and coal-mining, and was seriously adversely affected in the early 1990s by the demise of these traditional industries. The Council has responded well to this, with a determination to close the gap with national economic and social indicators. Since 1995, the Council has been successful in attracting £70 million of public sector and £154 million of private sector investment which has created and safeguarded 10,477 jobs. The Council has successfully promoted Wigan as a place to locate business, with many examples of internationally known organisations choosing to locate in Wigan and of playing a lead role in securing regeneration projects such as Leigh Sports Village and Wigan Pier. Most employment within the borough is now concentrated within the manufacturing, retailing and business services sectors.
- 23 Despite this success, Wigan remains a borough of contrasts. While parts of the area are pleasant and privileged, many residents suffer from multiple deprivation and inequality in several aspects of their lives, including pockets of high unemployment, worklessness, low expectations linked to low levels of attainment and skills, poor health, substance misuse and high crime. Life expectancy for both men and women is below national averages; however, there have been significant reductions in the high rates of coronary heart disease recently. Some 17.6 per cent of the population are in receipt of benefits compared to a national average of 11.9 per cent. Overall, the borough is the 53rd most deprived local authority area in England, and more than 37 per cent of the population live in the most deprived ten per cent of wards in the country. The Council has in recent years successfully addressed the proportion of non-decent homes in the borough.

The Council

- 24** The Council has a long-standing tradition of Labour control with currently 43 Labour, 13 Community Action Party, nine Conservative, eight Liberal Democrat and two Independent councillors. The Council operates under the Leader and Cabinet model of executive arrangements. The Cabinet is chaired by the Leader, and comprises the Leader and 9 senior councillors, each having a service-related portfolio with some also responsible for cross-cutting themes. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee heads the Council's scrutiny function. It is supported by four select committees, one of which takes responsibility for health scrutiny.
- 25** In the 2002 Comprehensive Performance Assessment the Council was judged to be 'excellent', and its progress since then is founded on that highly effective base. The current Chief Executive was appointed in 2005 specifically to move the Council and its partners to become outstanding.
- 26** The Council's officer structure comprises a well-established Strategic Management Team (SMT) of eight directors, led by the Chief Executive. Below this is the Corporate Delivery Team (CDT), consisting of the deputy directors. This is tasked to deliver the strategic agenda identified by SMT, with a particular focus on value for money. There are two external providers of services, the Wigan and Leigh Housing Company and the Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust. The Council employs around 11,000 staff, including teachers. The numbers of women in senior positions and people from minority ethnic communities who are employed by the Council are reflective of the local population, but people with a disability are under-represented.
- 27** The Council's net revenue budget for 2006/07 is more than £350 million. The planned capital programme for 2006/07 is £124 million. The Council has a valuable minority stake in Manchester Airport, owning 5.7 million shares. Maintaining a low council tax has been a long-standing priority, given the level of deprivation experienced by local people. In 2005/06, the Band D property council tax charge was £1,192, compared to an average for this type of authority of £1,205.
- 28** In 2005/06 the Council's priorities were: protecting vulnerable people who may be at risk, old, sick or unable to exercise their voice in society; helping children and young people to achieve their potential; reducing crime and increasing feelings of safety; and improving the environmental experience now and protecting it for the future. In 2006 it realigned its priorities to the revised community plan goals.

- 29** The Council is a key partner in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which the Leader chairs. The partnership board sets the overall strategic direction for Wigan and oversees seven thematic partnerships which focus on the key community strategy themes. The most recent community plan was agreed by the LSP in 2004. Local community involvement is further developed through ten township forums. Introduced in 2004 these enable local communities and councillors to contribute to local debate, decisions and the resulting neighbourhood action plans. The fourth element of the LSP is Encompass, which is a group of stakeholders who co-ordinate and engage the community, voluntary and faith sectors.

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

Ambition

- 30 The Council is performing strongly in this area. Its challenging but achievable vision is based on extensive consultation and analysis, and given focus through very strong community leadership and excellent partnership working. The Council has shown that it understands what is important to local people, and is committed to sustaining substantial improvements in areas where inequalities exist.
- 31 The Council shares with partners a firm and well-understood resolve to raise the aspirations of all local people and to improve their quality of life. Ambitions for Wigan are clearly articulated in a highly accessible Community Plan (2005/10), to which all stakeholders are fully signed up. The plan has a clear and ambitious vision for the borough of 'Building the future together - A place where people matter and you can afford to live the life you want'. This recognition of the importance of economic well-being in relation to improvements to quality of life is central to Wigan's approach to improvement. It is particularly challenging as the borough suffers some deep-seated deprivation.
- 32 The Council's strategic and operational plans directly reflect the community plan, sharing the same ambitions, objectives and outcomes, and supported by a challenging Local Area Agreement (LAA). The Council's vision is supported by three high level objectives of people reaching their full potential, strong communities, and a place where people want to live. Ten goals which align clearly to the community plan goals underpin these objectives, which the Council translates into its corporate plan, service plans and strategies. Every year the Chief Executive and Leader produce an issues paper which considers significant change issues, including customer feedback and financial and people issues, and looks back at the past year's performance. This paper provides the basis of debate, both within and outside the Council, which helps identify the challenges and formulate the priorities for the following year, which are then confirmed in annual updates of the corporate plan, service plans and individual development needs review. This debate takes place prior to the budget process, to enable appropriate targeting of resources.

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- 33** The Council has built on the firm foundations of its 'excellent' status to outline the road necessary to achieve 'outstanding' performance. It has sharpened its internal focus on reflecting the needs of local people and addressing cross-cutting issues, as well as delivering good and improving services. Ambitions for citizens - raising aspirations, ensuring that everyone in the community has the same opportunities, and ensuring service users are able to make the maximum possible contribution to identifying how services are delivered within their communities - now sit alongside the ambition to be an 'outstanding' council. These ambitions are supported by three underpinning priorities of improved value for money, joined-up services with partners and a focus on customers, including equalities and diversity.
- 34** The Council demonstrates very strong and effective leadership, working well in formal and informal partnerships to deliver local improvements. It has a long history of positive relationships with partners. The Leader and Chief Executive are widely recognised as providing strong and dynamic leadership to the community and partners. They positively encourage wide ownership of core issues, rather than dominate partnerships. The Leader uses his annual partnership convention to gather firm evidence to reflect what local people and organisations say are the key issues. Through this approach, the Council has been very successful in aligning the objectives of all key agencies to focus on important shared outcomes.
- 35** Ambitions have been translated into targets which are both clear and stretching, and are aimed at making a real difference to people's quality of life. The LAA targets address areas of greatest challenge, for example in relation to educational attainment, job creation and crime reduction. These targets are being used to measure progress and to identify areas where additional effort is required.
- 36** The Council has continued to set itself challenging ambitions to address the borough-wide priorities. It has an excellent track record of securing inward investment, and delivering significant improvements to both the physical environment and the economic and social well-being of local people. Wigan Council and its partners share an ambitious agenda to address health inequalities, to reduce the gap in life expectancy between the borough and the North West Region, and to 'ensure similar chances of staying healthy'. Underpinning targets are rightly directing services at the most deprived areas and groups at greatest risk, such as older people with chronic disease and those with long term mental health problems. Equally challenging ambitions for children and young people are clearly expressed in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP).

- 37 Community leadership is also a key strength within the Council, which has an excellent understanding of the borough's diverse social and cultural composition. The Council's commitment to equalities is demonstrated in a number of ways, including its work with the community empowerment network (CEN) and Encompass to engage with marginalised groups and individuals. Networks have been engaging well to address the community plan goals. The Council's work with asylum seekers - based on a wide ranging programme of support for integration into local communities - is particularly strong. It is currently reviewing the links between the township forums and the community (including BME) networks, to more closely align their work.
- 38 The Council extends this leadership to influence the wider sub-regional and regional agendas in pursuing ambitious plans to gain maximum benefit for the borough. It plays a leading role within the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA), and the Regional Assembly. This role has influenced transport, economic, housing and planning issues within the region to increase job opportunities and quality of life for local people.
- 39 Councillors, staff partners and local people understand well the Council's ambitions. The Council has clear and robust processes in place to consult on and communicate its ambitions for the area. It holds annual participative events in the community. Its civic magazine 'Borough Life' is published six times a year and provides residents with news of Council activity and local news stories, and was Council Publication of the Year in 2005. Internally, there are regular staff, manager and councillor briefings and newsletters. A staff survey in 2006 showed that 76 per cent of employees were satisfied with the Council's leadership and direction, 74 per cent understood what the Council is trying to do and 73 per cent understood its goals and objectives. The survey also shows a year-on-year trend of improvement.

Prioritisation

- 40 The Council is performing well in this area. It has clear, high level priorities which reflect the needs of the community. These priorities, which are shared with partners, fit well with regional and national priorities and enable the Council to stay focused on what needs to be done and to resource it appropriately.
- 41 Priorities are based on a thorough understanding of the needs of the local communities. The Council has taken an holistic approach to evidence and knowledge management, which its partners support. It uses a wide range of data sources, including traditional intelligence such as public health surveys, specially commissioned baselines such as 'Local Futures' in 2003 and 2005, and structured surveys using its citizens' panel.
- 42 The 2006/07 corporate plan identifies four cross-cutting priority themes: 'focusing on borough-wide priorities; renewing our focus on customers and equality and diversity; joining up services to better meet customer needs; and pursuing value for money'. This plan demonstrates the strong emphasis and priority the Council has placed on shaping services to meet local needs.

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- 43** The Council and its partners are clear about which key improvement areas they want to focus on, and their roles in delivering improvements. They use the LAA as the vehicle to address these improvement needs, through challenging outcome-focused targets in priority areas. The corporate plan sets out the links to the LAA, community plan and other strategies; and it clearly identifies the links to partners' roles, key actions with responsibility for delivering them, and challenging but realistic targets with defined outcomes. Departmental and service plans cross-refer to strategic plans, including key indicators, and show how activities link to overall objectives. Joint strategies in areas such as regeneration are shared among partners. Together, these mechanisms provide a good basis to monitor partnership activity effectively, and to measure outcomes and progress against priorities.
- 44** The medium term financial strategy sets out a robust strategic framework for prioritising the use of resources to support the corporate plan. Resources are strategically re-allocated in line with priorities, for example by increasing funding of direct payments and ceasing funding of local museums to refocus resources to improve poor library facilities and other cultural projects. The Council has also demonstrated its willingness to take difficult resource decisions to address areas of improvement - for example, closing schools (as part of a special school review) and swimming pools. Consequently areas targeted for improvement have been appropriately supported financially.
- 45** The Council is addressing areas of greatest need by linking its own and partners' resources. For example, budgets have been aligned within the Community Safety Partnership to respond to the fear of crime expressed by residents, which has resulted in additional Police Community Support Officers. The Council has recently jointly commissioned a £4.4 million contract for its drugs action team. There are some pooled budgets, and other integrated services where budgets remain separate. The Council is building on this, and the findings of the leadership development work outlined earlier, to drive forward this agenda of integrated budgets, particularly in areas such as health.
- 46** The CYPP's priorities are clear, deliverable, well-targeted and well-understood by both Council staff and partners. The plan is not clear, however, about which of its 52 priorities are the key ones while some elements of the more detailed implementation plan do not have quantifiable outcomes. The CYPP is not currently supported by medium term partnership financial planning. Although the Council has clearly evaluated the cost of its services against the five Every Child Matters outcomes, this is not yet the case for their Children, Young People and their Families Partnership (CYPF) which therefore cannot currently demonstrate its longer term sustainability.

- 47 The Council has a thorough knowledge about community cohesion issues, in particular in relation to asylum seekers, and customer consultation with them shows that the Council's work is making a positive difference. It has shaped plans to reflect the various needs and preferences of the diverse communities and interest groups that it serves. The Council uses survey results and a wide range of demographic data to identify how services affect different groups in the population. It also uses a range of local and qualitative information sources from its routine engagement activity, and has commissioned a programme focused on nine very deprived areas to develop further intelligence. The Council has also commissioned research to improve its understanding of the needs of economic migrants. However, the CYP's data relating to BME communities is under-developed.

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

Capacity

- 48 The Council is performing well in this area. It maximises partnership working, to increase capacity and to make the most impact. Councillors and officers work well together; roles and responsibilities are clear. The Council has built a strong financial position and shown that it can deliver value for money. It has refocused its arrangements to improve access to services and quality of life for all residents.
- 49 The roles and responsibilities of the Leader, councillors and officers and their delegated powers are clear. Decision-making is transparent and results in relevant actions. The Leader and Chief Executive are highly regarded throughout the Council, and by local and sub-regional partners for their contribution to community leadership. Senior officers work well with Cabinet members and treat each other with respect. Councillors are helped to understand their role by a comprehensive induction process after election, and by ongoing training and development. An open and positive culture among staff is very evident within the Council and maximises their ability to perform well to deliver the Council's ambitions.
- 50 The ethical framework is working effectively and councillors generally exhibit the behaviours expected. The Leader, Chief Executive and monitoring officer show strong commitment to ensuring adherence to the framework. However, some individual councillor behaviour has resulted in delaying Council business and requiring increased officer support. This is limited in extent, and being adequately addressed within the Council through good use of the standards committee.
- 51 Overview and scrutiny is working well and is delivering positive outcomes for local people as a result. However, a high amount of call-in by a very few individuals has inhibited its full effectiveness. The Council is addressing this through earlier involvement of scrutiny in policy development and by ensuring more collaborative working with other parts of the Council, including Cabinet.
- 52 The Council's management arrangements are clear, effective and kept under appropriate review. In 2005, the chief officer management team was devolved into teams, each with specific roles. The SMT rightly focuses on working with the Executive to set strategic direction for the Council, and meets regularly with the Chief Executives of the housing and leisure trusts. The Corporate Delivery Team focuses on service delivery, value for money and performance. These arrangements have enabled the Council to ensure it is working in the most efficient and effective way it can.

- 53 The Council uses partnerships with other public agencies and the voluntary sector extensively and effectively. This helps to increase its capacity to achieve ambitions for the borough and to deliver flexible services that meet diverse local needs. For example, it has attracted £1.76 million Partnership for Older People's Projects (POPP) funding, which will be spent on projects which are reliant on strong partnership working to develop services that help older people stay healthy and to maintain their well-being and independence. The Council is committed to building on its successful partnerships by moving towards integrated budgets and shared services, and has recruited consultants to support this change.
- 54 The Council effectively supports people to fulfil their roles. It takes a strategic approach to workforce planning and has addressed capacity issues successfully. It works well with partners to improve access to job opportunities and recruitment choice. It recently has achieved level two in the equalities standard for local government, and will shortly have plans in place to meet the requirement to have a disability equality scheme by December 2006 and a gender equality scheme by April 2007. By using equality workers' forums for specific groups of staff, it is taking steps to ensure that it takes the needs of all staff into account when designing policies and strategies. Overall, the Council's workforce is broadly representative of the diversity of the population, excepting people with disabilities, which the Council is addressing through an initiative focusing on the worklessness agenda and positive action regarding disability. As a consequence of this focus, staff feel empowered while recruitment and retention concerns are at a relatively low level.
- 55 The Council's financial capacity is strong. The three year revenue and capital budget reflects its focus on balancing service investment with the level of council tax, while its desire for a low council tax and relatively low government grant has resulted in a focus on carefully managing financial resources. Reserves - including over £20 million which is earmarked for specific services such as housing and schools - totalled £56 million at the end of March 2006. This is sufficient to deliver the proposed capital programme, meet unforeseen events and provide stability. The Council has identified the need to integrate mainstream services with neighbourhood renewal activity to increase value for money and improve outcomes for local people. It is working with its partners to consider lessons learned and explore new options.
- 56 The Council is using modern procurement, coupled with strong and effective project and risk management arrangements, to successfully improve capacity. It focuses strongly on efficiency in its procurement strategy. Many innovative projects and initiatives demonstrate the effectiveness of this focus, including collaboration with other Greater Manchester authorities. Operational and strategic risk registers identify clear and appropriate responsibilities. Reports to support strategic policy decisions and project initiation documents include appropriate risk assessments. The Council has a good track record of working with partners to deliver large scale projects successfully within budget and on time, such as the JJB sports stadium and several major ongoing projects including Leigh Sports Village, the Grand Arcade, the Joint Service Centre and Wigan Pier quarter.

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- 57 The Council is delivering good value for money (VfM) and is working hard to improve on this. Overall, the Council's costs are lower than those of other similar councils. Performance is generally good and improving. It has clear arrangements in place to assess and review service performance including effective use of best value reviews, the audit governance and improvement committee, the people strategy and the competency framework.
- 58 Information, communications and technology (ICT) and e-government are used effectively to deliver objectives and service improvements. The Council has achieved 99.3 per cent compliance with Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) targets, has improved access to its services and made substantial savings. Since 2002, online payments have increased by 600 per cent. Telephone payments using a free phone number have brought about savings of £425,000 per year. The Council's website is regularly reviewed and updated, enabling a wide range of its services to be available to the public all day and every day.
- 59 The Council manages its assets well and its plans clearly set out objectives for optimal property usage and costs. Although physical access to current buildings is an area of relative weakness it is addressing this appropriately within financial constraints. The Council is working towards its longer-term goal of delivering all of its services jointly with partners through 16 community access points across the borough by 2010, and has submitted the detailed business case for PFI funding. It has closed its cash offices and enabled payment services online and at post offices and its libraries, where the opening hours have been extended. The Local Improvement Financial Trust partnership (LIFT) has invested £33 million over the last three years to provide co-located health and social care services. Five new joint service delivery centres have been opened and a sixth is currently under construction. New buildings benefit from significantly improved access and support community engagement.

Performance management

- 60 The Council is performing very strongly in this area. It has an effective partnership, corporate and service planning framework, a track record of a strong performance-driven culture leading to improvement, and well-established leading edge systems in place to monitor and manage performance. Links to prioritisation of resources and financial management are clear. Good risk management processes are in place. In addition, performance monitoring is well-established within several partnerships and is developing well in others. The Council is proactive in learning effectively from others and is enthusiastic about sharing its expertise.

- 61 A demanding and rigorous performance management culture pervades everything the Council does. Performance management is integral to how people work, and proactive rather than simply monitoring. Senior officers set a strong example which cascades through the organisation. The Council's comprehensive framework enables effective management of services through an unremitting focus on outcomes and value for money. Particular attention is paid to service areas which are under-performing. This has resulted in improved performance, for example in recycling and street cleanliness.
- 62 Target setting within the Council is good. There are clear links between the high level objectives in the community and corporate plans through to service and team plans and employee development plans. Service planning is good and consistent across all services. The Council ensures that all staff contribute to target setting. Performance clinics - which comprise service managers and team members at all levels, and are supported by the performance improvement team - identify objectives, measures and tasks. This process enables all staff to gain a clear understanding of what their service is striving to achieve and how this contributes to achieving the Council's overall vision and improved outcomes for local people.
- 63 Employee development reviews support staff to understand their role and develop skills to meet the Council's ambitions. This system comprises an annual assessment with six monthly review, and relates individual performance including management competencies to corporate, directorate and service plans. Recognising staff through newsletters, surveys and awards has led to them having a positive awareness of the Council's priorities.
- 64 Service users and other stakeholders contribute appropriately to performance review and are well-informed about its outcomes. The Council is currently assessing how well its feedback mechanisms ensure continuous improvement. It uses surveys to consult on satisfaction rates and as a tool to drive service improvement. Service standards and customer charters are available across a wide range of services and are used well to communicate what can be expected of services to users. The Council also uses mystery shoppers to assess services. It is currently assessing the effectiveness of its feedback mechanisms, and uses its corporate complaints system effectively to drive improvement, for example speeding up payments for family and friends placements, new appeals procedures for adoption, improved direct payments system and rent arrears procedures.
- 65 The Council has excellent, systematic review arrangements to ensure performance towards targets stays on track. The lynchpin of these arrangements is its performance monitoring tool, Performance Plus, which enables regular and robust data to be collected from many sources and collated to provide a wide range of tailored reports for different purposes. The focus of senior officers and councillors is rightly on high level goals and key indicators. The SMT holds quarterly performance reviews. Cabinet reviews performance quarterly and the audit, governance and improvement committee now reviews performance six times a year.

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

- 66 The Corporate Delivery Team, made up of deputy directors, examines performance across the Council, looking at lower level indicators which contribute to the key strategic goals. This includes consideration of both service and corporate issues, such as sickness absence and value for money, and thus affords a very useful opportunity for both challenge and the sharing of good practice. Performance reviews also take place quarterly at departmental management team level and monthly with individual team leaders. Service panels, some of which include service users, review performance quarterly against individual service plans. Departments report on the full range of performance indicators and progress with key issues to their Advisory Panels, which provide further challenge.
- 67 The Council focuses its effort and resources on areas of concern. Performance Plus uses a traffic light system to code performance and achievement of milestones towards targets as red, amber or green, focusing on those red issues which are of greatest concern. An example of remedial action in response to poor performance is the recent re-commissioning of the drugs service from another provider, leading to a lower cost per place and increased numbers of service users. Similarly, poor performance in the number of looked-after children attending their reviews led to the Council commissioning Barnardo's to find out why, then making system changes which resulted in an increase from 40 per cent to 79.2 per cent in one year.
- 68 Prioritisation, financial planning and performance management are rightly and helpfully being integrated. The three-year budget setting process is being brought in line with the national comprehensive spending review to enable better modelling of best to worse case scenarios, and further increase stability. Links between financial and risk management are clear. Financial risks in operational expenditure are a key part of monitoring reports and the medium term financial plan.
- 69 Performance management within partnerships is effective and growing further in its range. The PCT and police directly input data into the Performance Plus system. The Council has proactively shared its expertise at the strategic partnership level, and the LSP has adopted the same approach for the Community Plan performance framework. This approach has enabled the LSP to identify priority areas for review, currently including worklessness, health inequalities and educational attainment. The Council also provides townships with local performance information related to their demographic profile, which supports them in setting and monitoring their local action plans. In addition, the community safety, health, children and young people's, and supporting people partnerships have all adopted the Performance Plus tool and have been well-supported in doing so. This has contributed significantly to partnerships improving outcomes, for example in community safety overall crime levels have been reduced by 13.6 per cent. The CYPF (the Children, Young People and their Families Partnership) has already received its first quarterly report on progress with the new CYPP, a significant achievement in the timeframe.

- 70** The Council welcomes internal and external challenge routinely to support its focus on customers and improve systems. Overview and scrutiny has played a significant role in achieving real outcomes for citizens. This work includes initiatives to reduce neighbourhood and youth nuisance, improved outcomes for asylum seekers, better value for money in relation to street lighting and improved dentistry facilities and information. The Council responds well to feedback. There are many examples, including the use of the local homelessness forum to challenge service delivery and Citizen Charter panels in best value review. The Council also uses external consultants to challenge its bi-annual evaluation, using the European Foundation for Quality Management excellence model assessment. This enables it to question effectively its own processes and further develop its user focus.
- 71** As part of its approach to continuous improvement, the Council has identified training on target setting as an area for development, to support guidance already issued to staff. A further refinement is that of needing to define criteria for identifying tasks without performance indicators as complete so that staff do not have to make value judgements when updating Performance Plus.

What has been achieved?

- 72 The Council is making good progress in achieving its ambitions for the area and has delivered improvements in terms of educational achievement, physical and economic regeneration, community safety, reducing health inequalities and helping people of all ages to live a better quality of life independently. Overall performance compares well. Fifty-nine per cent of indicators were above median in 2004/05, with 62 per cent improving between 2002/03 and 2004/05. Latest unaudited figures suggest that this level of improvement has been maintained, with 64 per cent of indicators improving and 40 per cent in the best-performing councils compared to the national average of 25 per cent. However, the Council has still to resolve the more intractable issues facing the borough and has worked hard to ensure that appropriate plans are in place to continue its improvement agenda.
- 73 There is a close fit between local and national priorities, with a clear intent to close the gap in national economic and social indicators. The Council's corporate processes are strongly focused on the delivery of its objectives in its priority areas.
- 74 There has been excellent progress in terms of economic regeneration and jobs. Environmental and sports regeneration activity has also contributed to improving quality of life. Neighbourhood renewal activity is resulting in positive outcomes.
- 75 The Council and partners have successfully reduced crime and anti-social behaviour and promoted community cohesion. Trends show that 25 per cent of indicators improved in 2002/03, 17 per cent in 2003/04, and 55 per cent in 2004/05. The unaudited 2005/06 figures show that six out of seven CDRP indicators are improving, with five out of seven above median performance. The LAA target to reduce domestic burglary was exceeded (down to 1,714 against a target of 2,208).
- 76 Outcomes for children and young people are good and generally improving. For example 86 per cent of indicators on helping children to meet their full potential are in the best 25 per cent of councils with 63 per cent improving. The LAA target for schools achieving the Level 3 healthy schools standard was also exceeded.
- 77 The Council's approach to adult services including older people's services is well co-ordinated and has made an impact on outcomes for vulnerable people. While health remains a major issue for the borough, some key areas show positive trends such as reduced mortality rates (although slower than nationally), increased physical activity, reduced alcohol and substance misuse, and more healthy eating. LAA targets for smoking cessation and adults receiving direct payments were exceeded, and there was increasing influence over decision-making.

- 78 By the nature of the challenge, it will take some time before some activities will result in demonstrable outcomes. The Council has made slower progress in reducing household waste, promoting recycling and improving street cleanliness. However, the pace of change has improved significantly in the past 18 months and there is a more joined up approach to tackling 'crime and grime' at neighbourhood level with 50 per cent of indicators improving between 2002/03 and 2004/05.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 79 The Council and its partners have a clear understanding of the issues for building sustainable communities in a borough with pockets of deep seated inequalities, including deprivation, worklessness, low income, health and social attitudes.
- 80 The Council has very successfully attracted major investment such as £120 million for the Grand Arcade retail development in Wigan, £55 million for Wigan Pier Quarter and Trencherfield Mill, and £83 million for Leigh Sports Village. It has just signed an agreement with a Chinese investment company to build an international trade centre, including wholesale operations, a hotel, casino and cultural facilities on its Westwood Park development and nearby sites. This significant project will potentially lead to major economic benefits to the local and regional economy including more visitors, approximately 2,000 new jobs and protecting existing jobs.
- 81 The Council has led ambitious, well-planned and designed regeneration projects, with good consultation mechanisms. Since 1995, it has successfully attracted £70 million of public sector and £154 million of private sector investment to create and safeguard 10,477 jobs. Many internationally-known organisations and businesses have chosen to locate in Wigan. The Council has also successfully attracted £85 million in grants for social and environmental regeneration to convert disused collieries and develop parks and open spaces such as Pennington Flash, which attracts over 700,000 visitors a year and is very popular with disability groups. It has supported other agencies, including local community groups and voluntary sector organisations, to win grants of £50 million to undertake a wide range of local projects which improve quality of life. Unemployment levels in the borough are now below the national average, but wages remain relatively low overall.

- 82 The Council has very successfully enabled sports-led regeneration. It led a three-year development of Robin Park to provide a suitable venue for both premiership football and super league rugby, an outdoor athletics arena, a range of high quality indoor facilities and a soccer dome complex. This has generated a 'feel good' factor across the whole area, encouraged more people to participate in sporting events and boosted tourism. To take advantage of Wigan Athletic achieving the premier league, the Council and partners including rail and hotel networks worked together to boost Wigan's profile and generate increased tourism. The additional 200,000 football spectators at home games generated an additional £11 million spending in the local economy, a 4 per cent increase in local hotel occupancy and the equivalent of £800,000 of media coverage both nationally and internationally. The Council has already shared the benefits of this experience with Reading and Sheffield whose football teams have also been recently promoted.
- 83 Initiatives to address worklessness are making a positive impact. Availability of affordable childcare is good, with 100 per cent of four year olds and 90 per cent of three year olds having places. In the more deprived areas, SRB funding has helped to create or safeguard several hundred jobs, 500 local people have gained qualifications, and employment among lone parents has increased from 49.9 per cent in 2002 to 53 per cent in 2004. Work continues to address skills shortages, in particular for people with a physical disability or other barriers making travel to work difficult, single parents and minority ethnic communities.
- 84 The Council is making some good progress in improving the local housing market, with significant improvements to the condition of both the private and public stock. It is on track to meet the decent homes standard by 2008, two years ahead of the 2010 target. The rate of housing development in the borough is above the level required by regional guidance and the number of low-demand council housing is reducing. Although the number of homeless acceptances is reducing, housing is becoming less affordable and choice more restricted. The Council is working with partners to address this through its affordable housing strategy, supported by short term measures, nomination agreements with Registered Social Landlords and the introduction of a bond scheme, and new planning measures.
- 85 The Council has a strong focus on neighbourhood renewal and is beginning to deliver its ambitions for the local environment, with significant improvements in the most deprived areas. Street cleanliness has improved from a low base. Projects to tackle hot spots and enviro-crime are having an impact. The Council has promoted many bulb and tree planting projects involving communities and provided additional play areas, skate parks and new green spaces. As a result, satisfaction has risen. Neighbourhood management is developing. A pilot multi-agency initiative in the Trees Estate over the past three years has made positive changes to the environment, health, community safety and fear of crime, life-long learning and community engagement. As a result, satisfaction levels in the estate have risen.

- 86 The Council's approach to waste management has been weak. Recycling levels have risen to 18.1 per cent (2005/06 unaudited) from 9.2 per cent in 2002/03, but waste collection is comparatively high cost. The Council undertook a review of waste services last year to identify partnership potential and procurement options. Short-term actions have resulted in the Council meeting its recycling targets and the reduction in household waste produced has helped meet Gershon efficiency targets, saving £259,000. But longer-term actions are still subject to consultation and under review, so that services are not yet providing value for money.
- 87 The Council's success in addressing transport issues is mixed. The transport infrastructure is in reasonable condition. Serious road accidents are below average and reducing in line with government targets. School bus initiatives have resulted in a 60 per cent shift from car to bus use. However, car use and public concern over congestion are increasing, public transport use is declining overall, and disadvantaged people have difficulty in accessing work and other facilities. Long-planned schemes to address congestion have failed in the past and the Council is now revising the Access Wigan strategy to secure improvements to transportation across the borough through regeneration activity. But this is likely to take time, and citizens' needs in relation to transport are not currently being adequately met.

Safer and stronger communities

- 88 The Council, with its partners, is successfully reducing crime although fear of crime remains high. Crime rates are lower than average compared with similar authorities and are the lowest in the Greater Manchester area. Overall crime levels have reduced by 13.6 per cent, with particular improvements in domestic burglary (22 per cent) and violent crime (41 per cent).
- 89 The Council works well with its partners at all levels to address crime and disorder, anti-social behaviour and alcohol and substance abuse. They share a clear understanding about the outcomes they are seeking to achieve - to reduce crime in the most deprived areas and improve the general quality of life of local residents. The Community Safety Executive chaired by the Chief Executive is effective, with clear priorities based on local knowledge and good performance management to ensure agreed actions are delivered by partners. The partnership also aligns funding and activity to deliver the crime targets in the LAA. The Council has allocated resources to NRF priority areas and focused on projects which will deliver added value. Evaluation processes to capture best practice are effective.

- 90 The Council and its partners have created firm foundations to develop a stronger community, using a range of engagement and capacity building techniques to create good knowledge about community cohesion issues. These techniques include establishing township forums with allocated funding to reduce crime levels; developing Encompass to support a range of diverse community networks; setting up an extensive range of programmes across the borough to develop and empower local communities; and working closely with the voluntary sector to increase the number of residents engaging in voluntary work. Feedback on the Council's role in improving capacity within the community from township forums, stakeholders and voluntary groups is very positive. The Council and partners integrate this knowledge into their action plans and programmes, through a clear framework with targeted objectives. Good local initiatives are in place to support asylum-seekers and economic migrants. Other Council programmes are in place to encourage communities to work and play together, such as Wigan One World Festival, Kick Racism Out of Football and Leigh Neighbourhood Project.
- 91 Community safety partners share good local intelligence. Good use of modern technology allows the police and Council to share all crime activity information, so that officers can take immediate action as well as providing significant potential to further reduce crime. The Council is working to engage more partners to achieve one integrated approach to recording anti-social behaviour.
- 92 The Council has integrated community safety issues well into its everyday service delivery, and some successful projects have resulted in important outcomes for local people. These include a programme of over 100 alley-gating projects which has reduced domestic burglaries by 39.5 per cent in 18 months, and a targeted offender programme which is projected to reduce re-offending by 86 per cent. The corporate induction programme and service plans address issues relating to community safety. For example, the environment service targets actions to tackle enviro-crime, alley-gating schemes and neighbour nuisance reduction, while tenancy relations teams address the crime and disorder agenda locally. Project evaluation is good, with learning acted upon and shared with others.
- 93 The Council is taking action to reduce the fear of crime. It understands well the impact of environmental factors on people's perception of crime and, with partners, is implementing a reassurance action plan which includes a range of activities to increase local people's confidence in their areas. These include 'door knocking' to gather intelligence, tackling single crimes, and tackling low level clean and green issues in priority neighbourhoods. As a result fear of crime has reduced.
- 94 Where crime rates have not improved, the Council and its partners have a good understanding of and are addressing the causes. Domestic violence figures have increased due to a proactive campaign to increase reporting, as this is considered to be a hidden problem. Car theft is being addressed through a range of activity and evaluation of preventative measures, including providing security locks for cars.

- 95 The Council is effectively tackling substance misuse. It works closely with its partners. The number of drug misusers in treatment has risen markedly in the last seven years, retention in treatment is good, and effective completion of treatment has risen slightly in the last two years. Overall, drug-related crime is falling.
- 96 The Council is achieving some improvements in safety. It has targeted road safety initiatives using engineering measures, education, training and publicity, enforcement and community engagement. This has resulted in a reduction of 11.6 per cent in the number of adults killed and seriously injured, 18.9 per cent in children killed and seriously injured and 34.5 per cent in slightly injured casualties over the past seven years to 2005/06. Workplace accidents have also reduced.
- 97 The Council has very strong risk-based business arrangements with the Fire Service, Police and Ambulance Services. They have good communication, joint strategies and joint incident training built on risk assessments and contingency planning. Business continuity arrangements are well-embedded, so that each time the Council responds to an incident it shares learning points and identifies gaps are for future action. As a result of testing, the Council has addressed communication weaknesses, raised awareness, and identified and resolved training needs.

Healthier communities

- 98 The Council and its partners demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that local people live healthier lives. Improving health and reducing inequalities for local people is an explicit priority in the LAA. Its vision for a healthy borough is one where people have similar chances of staying healthy, with greater opportunities to live a healthy lifestyle, and have increased life expectancy and improved quality of life. Its objective is rightly to target direct services at the 10 per cent most deprived areas and groups at most risk, older people with chronic disease and those with long term mental health problems. The LAA has provided the vehicle and much-needed funding to tackle these issues in more innovative and preventative ways.
- 99 The Council and its partners have developed a strategy based on a thorough analysis of local health needs. The strategy outlines the key tasks and outcomes for the next three years, for example for improving life expectancy, reducing emergency hospital admissions, increasing intensive homecare and take up of direct payments. The strategy is based on good local intelligence and thorough consultation with local agencies and residents. This data enables partners to see the actual prevalence of different health conditions, by individual general practitioner practice area. As a result, the strategy targets resources and interventions to areas where they are needed most to improve outcomes.

- 100 Adult services demonstrate significant improvements in improving health. Users can contact social services easily, and there is increased focus on direct payments and preventative services. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) found that the Council and partners have a coherent strategy for responding to national priorities and show good progress year-on-year, with sustained high performance in some areas. There is a clear link between strategy and front line performance, and a culture of continuous improvement. The Council has reduced the number of emergency hospital admissions for over 75 year olds by 25 per cent; more adults aged 18 to 64 are being supported to live at home; the number of adults with learning disabilities in residential and nursing home accommodation has greatly reduced; and there are good examples of improvement in mental health services.
- 101 There are also good examples of joint working with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to deliver key outcomes. Social care workers are trained to promote healthier lifestyles in the more deprived areas, and the homelessness team have been trained to tackle health issues of service users. The Council and partners have invested £400,000 to develop the smoking cessation service which is targeted at vulnerable people, resulting in 3,000 quitters so far and exceeding its targets.
- 102 The Council and its partners are working well together to tackle obesity and provide tailored targeted projects for high risk groups. A community outreach team has been appointed to increase take-up of physical activity sessions. This has resulted in participation in 2004/05 of 2,844 residents, exceeding its target.

Older people

- 103 The Council's strategic approach to improving services for older people is clear and comprehensive. There is genuine commitment to engagement, which is evidenced in many ways, such as the Innovations Forum and home care users surveys. Older people were consulted in the development of the older people's strategy, resulting in a good understanding of the developments needed across a wide range of issues to focus on prevention rather than dependency. CSCI have assessed social care services for adults and older people as good, with excellent capacity to improve, in the 2005 annual performance assessment.
- 104 The Council demonstrates strong leadership and engagement on older people's issues. An older persons' champion ensures their issues are considered at corporate level; and all departments, the voluntary sector and the over 50's forum are represented on an older people's steering group and an engagement forum. These mechanisms ensure that the needs and aspirations of older people feed into strategic areas other than adult services, such as housing needs, take-up of benefits, reducing crime and fear of crime, and promoting healthy and active lives.

- 105** The Council has clear aims for preventative services, and the means of achieving them have been identified by local older people as part of maintaining well-being and independence. It has developed key indicators as a result of holding events across the borough. Outcomes have been identified and agreed as the priorities for the next five years. The Council checks performance against indicators of quality of life, fear of crime, employment opportunities, income levels and consultation opportunities but this is still at an early stage.
- 106** Successful partnership working between the Council, voluntary and statutory agencies has secured £1.7 million funding for the POPP project. This is developing preventative services - for example rapid intervention schemes for carers, physical activity promotion and holistic home assessments - delivered through a partnership approach, which includes sharing research and information. The Council accepts the need to engage better with older people from minority communities. It intends to increase support for health and social care issues, and to understand why take-up of carer services for older people from within these communities is poor.
- 107** The Council works well with other agencies to support services to older people. Examples include the 'Starting Point' service run by Age Concern which provides single source information, advice and practical help, to promote independence and control in decision-making. Age Concern has also been contracted to support older people to take up direct payments, resulting in £242,000 of extra benefits being paid out in 2004/05. The Steps to Health Programme with Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust has successfully improved and maintained activity levels among older people, with a high satisfaction rate. Free swimming is provided to people over 60. Library services are provided to people who are housebound, many of whom are older people, and the satisfaction rate for the overall service is 96 per cent.
- 108** The Council and partners are making good use of inter-generational projects within the borough to develop understanding and respect between generations, and there are many examples of innovative collaboration to empower older people. Projects include older people talking to young people in schools about wartime experiences; young people teaching older people how to use text and the internet; and the 'Saying Hello' project which aims to reduce loneliness among older people.
- 109** Progress towards independence rather than dependency in older people's social care is good, but from a low base. The Council knows that it still has areas to address. The older people's housing study (April 2006) identified the need for further improvements to sheltered housing for older people. As a result, the Council has drafted an action plan to further map supply, demand and levels of need, and use this baseline to further consult on a range of options. The information gained from recent supporting people service reviews will also be fed into this exercise.
- 110** Transport for older people is not yet meeting needs. Community transport and ring and ride schemes have had variable feedback about flexibility and coverage. The Council is currently working with Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive to increase efficiency in assisted transport.

Children and young people

- 111** The council has worked effectively with a broad range of partners for some years to improve services for children and young people. This has led to generally good outcomes despite significant deprivation and a relatively low level of funding compared to similar authorities. Resources for children's services are well targeted to clear priorities. Services provide good value for money. Children's services' capacity to improve further is excellent. Leadership and operational management are both highly effective. The vision of the future development of integrated children's trust arrangements is well developed and supported by strong planning.
- 112** Good partnership working between the council and other agencies including the PCT is now improving children's health, and taking forward the public health agenda. Sure Start programmes have been effective in developing community services to provide support to families and promote healthy life styles for children. The council has provided good leadership of the Healthy Schools initiative. All schools are taking part in the Healthy Food in Schools initiative. There is effective inter-agency working to promote the health of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). A complex needs team supports families, children and schools.
- 113** Services in Wigan work well together to ensure that children and young people are safe. The reorganisation to form the council's Children and Young Peoples Service (CYPS) from April 2006 has strengthened its capacity to plan and deliver services to the most vulnerable. The Wigan Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) has made a confident start. There are new eligibility criteria for intervention that have been well-received and are now being piloted. New arrangements for referral and initial assessment are in place, and services are being re-focused to increase family support and preventative intervention. Child protection work is well-organised, and there is good joint working by front line staff from the council and partner agencies to support families and children in public care. Children and young people with disabilities are making more use of direct payments.
- 114** Early years' provision is excellent and young children are very well prepared for starting school. Educational provision is good, with standards generally in line with or above similar areas and the national average. The council's support for schools, including those causing concern, is becoming increasingly effective in raising standards. Targeted support has been effective in reducing the gap between lower and higher achieving schools. The school places and buildings plan is good, and good progress is being made on reducing surplus places in primary schools.

- 115** Effective strategies with good supporting measures have been taken to reduce permanent exclusions and promote improved behaviour in schools, but looked after children of all ages achieve well below pupils of similar age in Wigan. Council staff and other agencies work well to promote attendance and achievement, and practice is improving. Provision for those with LDD is generally good and has been recently enhanced through the council's special educational needs review. However, the council has not addressed the limited access to recreational and voluntary learning activities for these young people.
- 116** Involving children and young people in decision making is a high priority for the council, and most young people have good opportunities to contribute on issues of importance to their lives. Looked after children have access to an independent, good quality, advocacy service for complaints. The youth service is effectively brokering relationships between some township councils and young people to enable their views to be heard. Strong partnership working contributes to excellent work to reduce anti-social behaviour. The youth offending team is very effective in its work to prevent offending and reduce re-offending.
- 117** The council works well with its partners to ensure that young people are well supported to move into further learning or employment at 16 years. Connexions undertakes highly-focused and effective work, and referral processes between agencies are well-established. The youth service provides a good range of high quality activities. The council has played a key role in driving forward the local 14-19 strategy. Good progress has been made in extending the scope of vocational learning but much remains to be done to broaden collaboration.

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 Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 4 to 15 September 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.