

Corporate Assessment Report

December 2006



Corporate Assessment

Plymouth City 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 Plymouth City Council is performing adequately. Earlier corporate assessments identified the Council as having significant weaknesses as an organisation. Services for local people were poor, community leadership weak and the Council was failing to ensure the safety of its most vulnerable children. A recovery plan was developed, with support and monitoring arrangements. The Council is continuing to make significant progress in delivering the necessary improvements and deliver its recovery plan. The Council is now a strong community leader and services for local people are improving. Arrangements for keeping children safe are now adequate. The Council has made considerable progress along its journey and is continuing to focus on improving; inevitably many initiatives are new, and it will be some time before their effectiveness can be judged.
- 6 The Council, together with its partners, has a strong, all-political party vision for the City of Plymouth and its strategic position in the South West Peninsula. The overall ambition is to accelerate local population growth, increasing it by around a third, and develop Plymouth into a vibrant European waterfront city by the year 2020. It is a challenging agenda which is already delivering significant major regeneration developments such as the £170 million Drake's Circus. The local strategic partnership (LSP) has recently been re-structured around the themes of 'Healthy, Wealthy, Safe and Wise'. This is already a strong brand and is widely recognised and owned by stakeholders. However, it is too early to tell how effective the revitalised LSP will be in delivering its new action plans.
- 7 Council priorities are linked to the vision and objectives of the LSP, which incorporate eight strategic objectives for the community. These promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area, and focus on closing the gap between the most and least deprived areas of the City.
- 8 The 2006-2009 Corporate Plan is the first to reflect fully the Council's role in delivering the strategic objectives of the LSP. However, there has previously been a strong Council focus on supporting the delivery of the 'Vision for Plymouth', which is the long-term plan for the City of Plymouth, designed by David Mackay. The Council is also necessarily focused on its short-term priorities: improving children's services, finding an immediate solution to waste management and balancing its budget.
- 9 There is strong political and managerial leadership within the Council. Councillors and officers are clear about their respective roles. Through the transformational change programme, councillors have begun to review and consider introducing new models of service delivery which should improve value for money. This is important in strengthening the organisation to ensure it has the capacity to support its ambitious vision.

- 10 Capacity is now at an appropriate level to deliver the ambitions for Plymouth. However, given the challenging agenda ahead, some weaknesses in programme and project management remain, particularly in areas outside the key corporate projects; a continuing focus is needed in this area. Internally, significant recent recruitment has increased the Council's ability to manage its resources in support of its ambitions. For example improved asset management has allowed the Council to release land, and other assets - enabling strategic plans for the City to progress. Financial management is improving and there is a strong focus on delivering the medium term financial strategy. The Council is implementing an organisational development strategy and is beginning a transformational change programme to enhance its ability to deliver its ambitions. But it is too early to tell how effective these will be. The Council's approach to benchmarking and value for money is inconsistent - particularly at service level where some services are both expensive and not delivering to a high standard.
- 11 Actively managing performance is becoming part of the culture of the organisation and a range of services including planning, recycling and revenues and benefits have already improved as a result. There has been a strong recent focus on improving children's care services, and after several years of poor performance these are now improving and judged to be adequate. However, the Council has set itself a challenging agenda and performance management arrangements need to be further developed to fully support this.
- 12 The Council has achieved some positive outcomes in the shared priority areas. Key successes have been in promoting economic growth and supporting regeneration. Examples include the Tamar Science Park and the expansion of Plymouth University. Crime is generally low and a good partnership with the police has resulted in an extremely effective approach to anti-social behaviour. However, although health has improved, the Council and its partners have not succeeded in reducing overall health inequalities. The Council does not have a strategic approach to older people which goes beyond health and social care, however, at a service level, there is good consideration of their needs.
- 13 The importance of community cohesion for Plymouth is recognised in the Race Equality Scheme and other key Council and LSP documents, and the Council has acted to improve understanding and tolerance across the City. However, the Council's strategic approach to community cohesion and diversity needs developing further. Partners recognise the commitment from council leaders and the improved engagement with representative groups, but regard diversity and equalities as an area which needs a continuing focus. This is particularly significant if the City achieves the population growth it aspires to in its overall vision.

Areas for improvement

- 14 The Council has worked hard with its partners to re-structure the LSP and the respective theme groups. It needs to continue taking the lead on developing action plans which contain clear, measurable, outcome-based interim targets across all themes, against which progress can be monitored. It also needs to clarify the arrangements for reporting and accountability so that partners fully understand the agreed processes.
- 15 The Council and its LSP partners need to further develop their strategic approach to community cohesion and diversity. Despite significant efforts at raising the profile of diversity, current arrangements appear ad-hoc, and stakeholders do not recognise a joined-up strategic approach.
- 16 The Council has an ambitious growth agenda for the City. Since 2000 the Council has delivered around 150 affordable homes each year. A recent sub-regional housing market survey suggests that this will need to increase if the growth ambitions for the City are to be met. The Council, with stakeholders needs to consider the findings of the 2006 Housing Market and Needs Assessment and plan a response that continues to support the Vision for Plymouth.
- 17 Partnerships with health are not well advanced and are not consistently delivering significant benefits. Some individual projects are working well, but overall more work is needed to ensure that the Council and its health partners begin to reduce the health inequalities that local people experience in Plymouth.
- 18 There is no strategic approach to older people in Plymouth. Following the failure of the recent Partnership for Older People Project (POPP) bid, the Council needs to decide how it will co-ordinate its plans for older people, which go beyond health and social care.
- 19 The Council is going through a period of rapid change. It has improved the majority of its corporate systems which will support the delivery of its key priorities. However, some of these new processes need further development to ensure that they maximise their impact.
 - The Council needs to ensure that it is achieving the maximum impact from its investment in the performance management framework. For example the Council should review its target setting and reporting arrangements to ensure continued improvement and delivery of its challenging ambitions.
 - The role of scrutiny councillors in managing performance needs to be seen to make a difference and improve services. For example while performance review is taking place, it is not clear if the current arrangements are delivering good value for money in terms of improving performance.
 - HR is not yet supporting the vision and ambition of the Council. The Council recognises this and has developed an organisational development strategy. However, there needs to be a continued high level focus on ensuring that planned improvements are delivered to time and are effective.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	2
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2
	Performance management	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 five 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 Plymouth is an urban area in the South West of England. It is a large city in an otherwise mainly rural setting. It has a rich naval history which has shaped the development of the City. Historically, economic prosperity mainly relied on defence-related industries. Major job losses since the 1980s led to a series of government interventions from 1990, including European funding, Education, Employment and Health Action Zones, and six rounds of Single Regeneration Budget funding. Plymouth continues to receive Neighbourhood Renewal funding. Major regeneration projects have started to be delivered across the City as part of the long term 'Vision for Plymouth'.
- 21 The population is currently 244,400 (ONS 2004) and this is set to rise by 13.7 per cent by 2021. Ninety seven per cent of the population are of white British origin compared to 87 per cent in England as a whole. The ethnic minority population of the city is growing, particularly in primary schools, where around 4.4 per cent of all new admissions are from a black or minority ethnic (BME) background.
- 22 Plymouth is ranked seventy sixth out of 354 (where 1 is most deprived) local authority districts according to the Department for Community and Local Government indices of deprivation. This ranking masks the significant differences between the most affluent and most deprived local areas. Five out of 43 neighbourhoods are wholly or partly within the worst 3 per cent of deprived areas nationally. Plymouth's most deprived 'super output areas' make up 3.75 per cent of the most deprived in the country. There are noticeable health inequalities, with residents from one part of the City living up to six years longer than those from another neighbourhood. When compared with the surrounding rural area, the difference is greater at up to eight years. Mortality from cancer and coronary heart disease is above the national average.
- 23 Wages are lower than the national average. Unemployment is above the regional and national averages and there is a higher than average proportion of the working age population on benefit. The number of workers in Plymouth with higher level qualifications (NVQ4 and above) is significantly lower than the regional and national averages.

The Council

- 24 The Council has 57 councillors. Elections are held in three out of four years, with one third of council seats being contended each time. Elections in May 2006, followed by a by election in June 2006, led to a continuing Labour administration, although with a reduced majority. There are 29 Labour councillors, 25 Conservative councillors and 3 Liberal Democrat councillors.

- 25 A leader and cabinet model of political governance was adopted in 2002. There are eight cabinet posts covering a range of portfolios; the leader and deputy are also responsible for corporate portfolios. There are deputy cabinet members (non-executive) and 'champions' for design, the historic environment and older people. The Council has five overview and scrutiny panels, overseen by an Overview and Scrutiny Commission, consisting of the chairs of the panels.
- 26 The management team consists of the Chief Executive and four strategic directors responsible for children's services, community services, development and corporate resources. The management team also includes the Director of Public Health (a joint appointment with the Primary Care Trust), the Head of Human Resources, the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Policy and Performance. Ten new senior management posts have been created following DCLG capacity building funding, together with 14 new managers within children's services, following a strategic partnership with Cambridge Education Limited and OLM Limited.
- 27 The Council works closely with Plymouth 2020, its LSP on agreed community strategy goals and objectives.
- 28 In 2006/07, the Council has a net revenue budget of £170 million and a capital programme of £75.5 million. General Fund balances at the beginning of 2006/07 were approximately £4 million. There is a significant budget gap in terms of its financial capacity over the next two to three years, and levels of reserves are low. The council tax for a band D property in 2005/06 was £1,176 which is slightly lower than the unitary council average and the lowest in the region.

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

Ambition

- 29 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. Through strong local partnerships, the Council has developed challenging ambitions for Plymouth which have secure all-party agreement, and now give the council a clear sense of direction. It has a good understanding of local needs and plans that reflect this. Good communication and consultation ensures support from local stakeholders. Some key regeneration projects - important to the vision - have already been delivered. The Council is a strong community leader. The reconfigured LSP is relatively new and untested, but it has made rapid progress towards its 2007-2010 Local Area Agreement. However, further work is needed to develop an effective strategic approach to community cohesion and diversity.
- 30 The Council has challenging ambitions and a strong vision for the City. It has, with its partners, developed an overarching strategic vision, to make Plymouth a vibrant European waterfront city by the year 2020 where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by everyone. This vision will require an accelerated population growth from around 250,000 to 350,000. The vision, which was comprehensively consulted upon prior to adoption, was added to by David Mackay's 'Vision for Plymouth', commissioned in 2002 and subsequently adopted by the LSP. The ambitions are strongly branded under the themes of 'Healthy', 'Wealthy', 'Safe' and 'Wise', each led by a key strategic partner. The themes incorporate eight strategic objectives for the community that promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area:
- improving health and well being;
 - developing a prosperous economy;
 - promoting community safety;
 - raising educational achievement;
 - promoting inclusive communities;
 - developing an effective transport system;
 - maintaining a clean and sustainable environment; and
 - stimulating culture and leisure activities.
- 31 In addition, there are cross cutting themes of older people, children and young people, and those living in the most deprived areas.

- 32** The ambitions are challenging, and aim to make a real difference to local people's lives. The Council, together with its partners, is looking for long term sustainable solutions to issues such as poor quality housing, health inequalities and the need to increase local economic activity and reduce reliance on the defence sector. It also recognises the need to ensure that local people are equipped to work in this new environment. Ambitions transcend City boundaries as Plymouth seeks to establish itself as an important regional centre. Local housing solutions have been developed in partnership with South Hams District Council and include a housing development of national significance at Sherford.
- 33** The themes and objectives are based on a good understanding of local need. For example the significant local health inequalities are reflected in the 'improving health and well-being' objective. Ensuring that local people are well placed to benefit from the expansion of the City, is reflected in a number of objectives (developing a prosperous economy, raising educational attainment and promoting inclusive communities). The Community Strategy (City Strategy) was originally produced in 2004 and based on extensive research and community consultation. This was recently updated to support production of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), Floor Target Actions Plans (FTAPs), which have been adopted by the theme groups of the re-structured and re-vitalised LSP. This resulted in the production of an Interim Community Strategy and is strongly linked with the NRF focus on narrowing the gap between the least and most affluent areas of Plymouth.
- 34** Communication about the vision and ambitions is effective. Councillors, officers and partners are clear about their respective roles and believe that the ambitions are realistic and achievable. Local people know what the LSP is trying to achieve and understand the pressures on the Council and its partners in delivering the overall ambition. For example, whilst supportive of the proposed developments there is considerable local awareness of current budget difficulties within the Council and its health-sector partners.
- 35** Engagement with the local business community is strong, exemplified by the development of a successful Business Improvement District, which is delivering noticeable street scene improvements. This relationship is very important for the delivery of the Vision for Plymouth.
- 36** The Council provides strong community leadership. Over the past 18 months, the Leader and Chief Executive have led on re-engaging with partners and rebuilding the LSP. The key players in the LSP provide strong leadership to support delivery of the overall vision for Plymouth, The reconfigured LSP is relatively new and untested, but it has made rapid progress towards its 2007-2010 Local Area Agreement. The early draft includes clear targets, outcomes and accountabilities. FTAPs have been adopted by the relevant theme groups, but other action plans are still being developed and interim targets for measuring progress, are not fully agreed. Overall it is too soon to tell how effective the re-configured LSP will be in achieving its aims.

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- 37 The Council's strategic approach to community cohesion and diversity is underdeveloped and needs to be more effective. However, the Council is improving its engagement with people from BME communities and others categorised as harder to reach such as the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender groups. Most representative groups feel the Council is making a good effort to engage with them on a wide range of issues. There are also arrangements for engaging other groups who are at risk of disadvantage, for example the Senior Citizen's forum, on matters affecting their members. The Plymouth Guild and the Plymouth Community Partnership are represented on the LSP.
- 38 The importance of community cohesion for Plymouth is recognised in a number of key documents including the Council's Race Equality Scheme. The Council has taken steps to improve understanding and tolerance across the City such as the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Project completed in 2004 and a successful Respect 2005 festival attended by 12,000 people. However, partners agree that diversity and equalities is an area which needs further development. This is particularly significant if the City achieves the population growth it aspires to in its vision.

Prioritisation

- 39 The Council is performing adequately and meeting minimum requirements in this area. Council priorities reflect local and national issues. There are strong links between the LSP and Council priorities. Financial and service planning supports the delivery of the priorities. Some plans and strategies lack clarity or sharper, more challenging targets and some individual plans and appraisals are not yet embedded. Councillors have taken difficult decisions to support delivery of the priorities. The Council's plans for promoting diversity need further development to fully meet the priorities of the wider community.
- 40 The Council has a good understanding of national priorities and effectively interprets these within a local context. It is clear about what is important for local people and together with partners, has set priorities which both focus on what matters locally, and balances the needs of most communities. For example, although the overall vision is to create a vibrant waterfront city, there is also a focus on ensuring that local people will be able to live in the newly regenerated areas, such as Devonport, and that they will be able to share in the growing prosperity of the City. These priorities are well understood by stakeholders.

- 41 Alongside the community strategy priorities, the Council has its own clear and well-embedded corporate priorities. Short term priorities are necessarily reactive, as it responds to historically poor forward planning and long term service failure. The Council's short term priorities are: improving children's services, finding an immediate solution to waste management and balancing its budget. Medium term priorities include improving the corporate focus of HR, the transformational change programme and bringing the housing stock up to the Decent Homes Standard. Until recently, an additional Council priority was to deliver on the 'recovery plan' agreed with ODPM (now DCLG) - an area where it has made significant progress.
- 42 The Council assesses and monitors local needs and takes this into account in setting its priorities. Many of these needs are reflected in the current LPSA targets which include improving the life chances of looked after children, the quality of life and independence of older people, and reducing the number of teenage conceptions. The draft 2007-2010 LAA strongly focuses on the key local priorities, with clear proposed targets and outcomes which support the overall aim of 'creating and sharing sustainable prosperity'.
- 43 The Council's plans for promoting diversity are not currently fully meeting the priorities of the wider community. They are being developed through the Social Inclusion Unit and include on-going support for the annual Respect Festival, implementation of the Corporate Equalities Work Plan, and development of Equalities Impact Assessment process, guidance and staff training. The plans will require further development if they are to fully meet the priorities of the wider community. For example, the Council has been slow to carry out service needs assessments, which are important to ensure that people at risk of disadvantage receive the services they need. However, there is recognition by key stakeholders that council leaders do take diversity seriously and that engagement is improving.
- 44 The Council has key strategies in place, such as the Local Transport Plan and Local Development Framework, which support its ambitions for the area. It is systematically reviewing all relevant strategies to ensure that they support the priorities. The Council does not have a current culture or leisure strategy and current service plans are of variable quality. It is investing around £9 million in its cultural services during 2006/07, including £1.5 million on the Pavilions - a leisure complex, and £0.8 million on the theatre. Without a strategy, there is less certainty that this is the most appropriate way of maximising support for the strategic objectives and confusion about the relative status of leisure as a priority.
- 45 There is no overall strategy that explains how the Council and the LSP will work in partnership with the large and active voluntary and community sector. The Council's Civic Pioneer Plan, has been agreed with stakeholders, but is in an early stage of development. This is creating confusion and uncertainty about the sustainability of some of these groups despite the Council's generally good relationship with this sector. The Council has established a range of service level agreements and provides ad-hoc grants to some groups, but without an overall strategy it is difficult to measure the contribution this makes to the priorities.

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- 46** Most key plans and strategies have clear targets and priorities. For example, targets in the Children and Young People's Plan are sufficiently challenging to make a real difference. Priorities are cascaded into service plans and in some cases individual plans, although performance appraisals are not fully established; so far, just over half of Council staff have been appraised. Some service plans lack clarity and the quality of the target setting within these, to support the delivery of the priorities, is inconsistent. For example, it is not always clear what the Council is measuring, or what baseline it is reporting against. The Council has challenging ambitions and it is essential that stretching targets are set, if these ambitions are to be met.
- 47** Financial planning supports the Council's priorities. The Council has recently developed its first three-year medium term financial plan which is linked to its corporate plan priorities. This allows the Council to prioritise its spending decisions for the first time and to shift resources from lower to higher priorities - which supports its priority of achieving a balanced budget. An example of this is when the Council reviewed its planned expenditure on a major schools' PFI; when viewed against the overall corporate priorities, particularly safeguarding children, it was decided that the full scheme was no longer affordable. As a result, the PFI was scaled down to allow increased spending on children's social care. This also illustrates that councillors are prepared to take difficult decisions where necessary, to support delivery of the priorities. Other recent examples include school closures to reduce the impact of falling rolls, the closure of residential care homes to release funding for domiciliary care and the early closure of Seaton Pool. These decisions have been made against a backdrop of a very small majority and further elections in April 2007. As a result of this, stakeholders are optimistic about the Council's ability to prioritise and deliver on its ambitions.

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 adequately and meeting minimum requirements in this area. It has made a significant investment in capacity building to address the historical weaknesses and support the delivery of its vision; most of the key building blocks necessary to do so are now in place. The majority of these are in their early stages of development and some are not yet delivering the level of support necessary to deliver the Council's ambitions for the City.
- 49 There is strong political and managerial leadership. Staff are generally committed and well motivated and most are keen to embrace the new 'can do' culture of the organisation. With help from the DCLG Capacity Building Fund, the Council has recruited staff to ten new permanent senior management posts. These are in key areas such as HR, procurement and asset management. This is important as it increases the Council's capacity in fundamental areas, which will be crucial for the delivery of its challenging ambitions.
- 50 Officers and councillors are clear about their responsibilities and treat each other with respect. Councillors take responsibility for strategy and policy and tend not to interfere in minor operational issues. Relationships between senior officers are good and there is a strong sense of corporate responsibility. Decision making is transparent and scrutiny arrangements have been established and are continuing to develop.
- 51 Ethical and governance arrangements are appropriate. There is a standards committee, which has a clear programme of work. Sixty per cent of its members are independent, but the Chair is not, although this has been recently reviewed. A register of interests and a record of gifts and hospitality are both maintained. The ethical agenda has a high profile; the monitoring officer is part of the corporate management team. The standards committee and monitoring officer provide advice, training and assistance to councillors on the ethical framework.

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- 52** The approach to delivering and managing value for money is inconsistent. Some service areas, such as 'supporting people' and education, provide good value for money. But waste collection which is expensive when compared with others, only provides average or below average standards of performance. Spending on housing management is around average, yet performance, although improving, is still poor, when compared with other councils, especially in the turnaround time for voids, the number of homes meeting the decent homes standard and dealing with rent arrears. The Council has responded by developing a more consistent approach to value for money through the transformational change programme which delivered £750,000 of cashable savings in 2005/06. A number of projects have been selected for the current financial year and beyond, but, it is too early to tell how effective they will be at improving value for money.
- 53** People management is improving and starting to rise to the challenge of the large scale changes taking place across the Council. There is a strong corporate focus on ensuring that HR effectively supports the Council to deliver its ambitions. The HR function has been re-organised and the head of service is a member of the corporate management team; HR is one of the Council's medium term improvement priorities. The Council recognises the need to focus more on organisational development, strategic workforce planning and equalities and diversity, if it is going to improve its ability to deliver better services for local people. It has some plans in this area already, but these are not developed consistently across the organisation. Some staff and some trade unions are not fully engaged in bringing about change. There has been no all-staff survey since 2000, although surveys have been carried out within revenues and benefits, asset management and children's services. HR has produced a high level action plan in response to the recent Audit Commission's review of its service; the quality of project plans underpinning this action plan and the rate of their implementation is inconsistent. It is important that these HR improvements fully support the strategic priorities of the Council.
- 54** Risk management arrangements are effective. Both strategic and operational risk assessments are included as part of the performance management system; key operational risks, identified as having strategic importance, have been included within the Strategic Risk Register. Strategic management of risk is important, because the Council's challenging ambitions generate a busy and complicated work agenda.
- 55** Individual key corporate projects are well managed, but better coordination of overall programme and project management is required. With the level of internal change currently underway - including the transformational change programme, job evaluation, a challenging budget and a scheme to relocate the Council's main offices - this represents a significant threat to the Council's ambitions. A corporate programme management group has recently been established, led by a member of the asset management team. Without strong programme and project management arrangements aligned to the key risks, the Council will find it difficult to co-ordinate the delivery of a challenging change management agenda.

- 56 Asset management has improved greatly and now supports delivery of the Council's priorities. A new strategically focused team now manages the Council's assets, with a comprehensive plan, agreed in March 2006, which reflects good practice. Strong governance and performance management are in place. The plan sets out an ambitious programme to support the vision for the City to 2010. However, only 14 per cent of Council buildings meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act - an outcome which does not support the development of a diverse workforce and community.
- 57 The Council's approach to strategic procurement has significantly improved and early project work in areas such as ICT is already delivering noticeable savings. In June 2006 the Council began a strategic partnership within children's services; 14 new managers were recruited to promote improved services to children and young people - a key priority for the Council. This partnership has allowed the service to make rapid progress against some key tasks and produce early signs of improvement.
- 58 The Council has sufficient ICT resources to deliver its priorities. Projects are being prioritised and co-ordinated, managing expectations from service areas. Staff are being enabled to carry out their duties more effectively and are positive about the support they get.
- 59 The Council works in partnership with a wide range of organisations to enhance its capacity. Successful partnership working has helped to deliver an effective approach to anti-social behaviour, with local people feeling safer as key offenders are dealt with robustly. In addition the BID has been effective at improving the quality of city centre streets.
- 60 The Council has a range of service level agreements with the voluntary and community sector, but its approach to partnership working in this area could be more strategic. Without a clear understanding of partner contributions, it is unlikely that opportunities will be maximised. This is particularly important because the Council has a long history of supporting a wide range of organisations across the City, some of whom provide overlapping services.
- 61 The Council has a three-year medium term financial strategy which focuses on the delivery of its priorities. Historically, its financial management has been weak, but the external auditor has acknowledged recent and significant improvements - the Council's use of resources was judged as adequate in 2005/06. A key part of the transformational change programme includes a major overhaul of the financial management systems within the Council. There is a significant budget gap in terms of its financial capacity over the next two to three years, and levels of reserves are low. The Council has plans in place to address this. The Council has a strong track record of accessing external funding to increase its capacity to deliver its priorities, for example, through the Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership, New Deal for Communities money has been used to improve the quality of the local environment and stimulate the building of high quality mixed housing in Devonport.

- 62 There is more to do in developing diversity and equality and ensuring that employees are representative of the local workforce. The Council has achieved level 1 of the Equality Standard and has plans in place to reach level 2 within the next 12 months. Although the Council's performance under 'duty to promote race equality' improved slightly, its overall performance in 2005/06 was still among the worst in the country. In addition, its progress at improving the accessibility of Council buildings - a requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act - has been slower than most other councils in the country.

Performance management

- 63 The Council is performing adequately and meeting minimum requirements in this area. Performance management is becoming part of the culture of the Council, with frameworks that ensure regular reporting and monitoring. The Council has used performance management to deliver planned service improvement in priority areas. The contribution of Councillors to performance management is improving but needs to develop further in terms of making an impact on performance. Performance data is widely available, but performance reporting is not always clear, although key service improvements have been delivered. The performance management arrangements of the LSP are not fully developed and as yet, are untested.
- 64 Performance reporting is embedded across the Council. There is a performance management framework in place, incorporating a system of quarterly monitoring and reporting which has been used consistently, over the last three years, to monitor progress against BVPIs and LPSA targets. Since April 2006, the Council has been monitoring performance against its new corporate plan. However, it has not yet developed local performance indicators, although much of what is reported deals with progress on projects, such as the HR IT project, the waste management project and the transformational change programme.
- 65 There is an increased focus on performance at all levels within the Council; service managers routinely use performance management to improve service delivery. In recent months the performance management framework has successfully been applied to the children's social care service, which has now been judged as adequate, after several years of inadequate performance. Noticeable improvements in other service areas include revenues and benefits - where the majority of indicators are now in the best quartile, planning (minor applications), waste recycling and dealing with homelessness. In addition the Council has improved its performance across a wide range of performance indicators. Between 2004/05 and 2005/06, it improved 63 per cent of key indicators.
- 66 There is a good sense of self awareness within the Council at all levels. A focus on managing performance has ensured that progress with the recovery plan and improving services has been significant over the past three years. There is also a good understanding of what still needs to be done.

- 67 Councillors are focused on performance management in both executive and scrutiny roles. There are regular meetings between officers and cabinet portfolio holders, with a strong focus on reviewing performance. Informal discussions and briefings take place before regular cabinet meetings; monthly meetings are held to discuss cross-cutting issues. Overall, these arrangements lack consistency and have been developed to meet the needs of individual councillors, rather than taking account of risk.
- 68 Scrutiny is improving but could do more to maximise its effectiveness in managing performance. Scrutiny members monitor performance but the Council does not know if this arrangement adds value. Quarterly monitoring reports are received and discussed by the Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Both officers and cabinet members are called in to explain under-performance, but discussions about potential solutions, recommendations and follow-up actions take place in an inconsistent way. The Scrutiny Panel provides a report to the Cabinet, where it is acknowledged, but often without further discussion. More could be done to measure the effectiveness of the current arrangements in improving performance.
- 69 The Council produces up to date (and on-line) performance information which is available to councillors and officers. However, the quarterly monitoring report is over-simplistic and would encourage greater challenge if improved. It is a lengthy document which does not focus on those areas most at risk. A traffic light system is used to determine whether the Council is on track, but information is presented inconsistently; some officers report progress against the Council's own target and others report absolute progress. This approach encourages confusion and does not support effective decision-making or continuous improvement. For example a 'green light' was given against the target of meeting the decent homes standard by 2010, when it had already been acknowledged that this national target would be missed. It is important that performance management tools have targets that are risk assessed, are stretching and clearly presented, if they are to be used for driving continuous improvement and meeting priorities.
- 70 Performance management arrangements for the LSP are still developing. At the time of the inspection, SMART interim targets had not been developed to support the FTAPs, however, this has now been progressed. Data is shared among partners and protocols established. However, it is too early to tell how effective these arrangements will be and some partners are confused about reporting arrangements and accountabilities - which is likely to frustrate efforts to deliver the local priorities.
- 71 The Council is not systematically using complaints and user feedback to improve its services. However, there are some instances where engagement with users is leading to service improvements. For example, the Council's engagement with users led it to actively manage the impact of civil partnerships on benefit claimants, including training staff to deal sensitively with issues around sexuality. Also, users were involved with developing the new homelessness strategy. In order to continue to improve its ability to meet the needs of local people, it is important that there is systematic engagement with both service and non-service users.

What has been achieved?

- 72 The Council is performing adequately and meeting minimum requirements in this area.
- 73 The Council, with its partners, has made some progress in delivering its priorities and improving the quality of life for local people. Although the strategic objectives of the LSP and the Council's priorities have recently been revised, they remain consistent with the Vision for Plymouth, originally adopted in 2004, the 2004 Community Strategy and the agreed LPSA targets (2004-2007). Key priorities such as reducing health inequalities, reducing deprivation, improving community safety, improving housing and economic development, are areas that the Council has focused on for many years. It is within this broader context that some of the achievements should be viewed.
- 74 The Council has performed strongly in regeneration partnerships, where major developments have been delivered. It has supported economic development initiatives, although local skills levels have not improved enough to ensure that all residents can share in the new economic prosperity of the City. Recycling rates are improving, waste management problems have been resolved for the short to medium term and the physical environment has improved. Despite Council initiatives, it is not yet meeting its LPSA bus patronage stretch target.
- 75 Reducing crime and improving community safety is a priority for the Council, but the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) is not meeting its targets for reducing crime levels. The approach to dealing with anti social behaviour is good and is improving the quality of life for local people. By contrast, there is a lack of strategic focus on tackling alcohol and drug abuse and incidents of misuse continue to cause problems and impact on the quality of life for local people. The Council has met its ten-year target for the reduction of accidents. Appropriate emergency arrangements are in place. There is no clear strategy on community cohesion although the Council's approach to diversity and equality is recognised in a number of its key documents.
- 76 There are significant health inequalities across the City; reducing these inequalities is an LSP objective. However, the 2005 FTAP for health, identifies that improvements in circulatory disease, cancer and life expectancy are largely in line with national improvements and do not demonstrate significant reductions in health inequalities. Good quality housing is a key priority, but overall, the quality of public sector housing and some private housing in Plymouth is poor and a high number of houses are unfit. The Council will not meet the decent homes standard by the national target date of 2010.
- 77 The Council does not have a strategic approach to older people, beyond that for health and social care. However, an LPSA target to improve the quality of life and independence of older people is being successfully met.
- 78 Improving services for children and young people is a key priority for the Council and a cross cutting theme for the LSP. After years of poor service, arrangements and outcomes have improved and are now judged as adequate.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 79** A key priority for the Council and its partners is to promote and support development of the local economy as part of the overall vision for the City. The Council has a strong relationship with the business community, which in turn is leading on the 'wealthy' theme of the LSP. Achievements include joint regeneration and business growth initiatives, developed through the LSP which have also accessed significant external funding. Large scale developments, such as Drake's Circus, The Tamar Science Park and the expansion of Plymouth University are being delivered. General planning policy to increase the density and height of buildings is beginning to bring more residential accommodation back into the City centre; high quality apartments have been constructed on top of banks and other commercial buildings. The regeneration of Devonport is well underway and is already delivering high quality mixed housing.
- 80** Local people are not yet sharing in the growing wealth and prosperity of the City. Both unemployment and the number of people on benefit are still higher than the regional or national averages. The Council and its partners are aware of this, and realise that there is still more to do to increase the skills levels of local people, so that they can fully benefit from the increased economic vibrancy of the City. As part of the overall vision, the LSP currently is applying for a grant of around £25 million over ten years to promote enterprise activity in the more deprived areas.
- 81** The Council has improved its planning service to provide better pre-application advice and Council assets and land are being used - as part of the Asset Management Strategy - to support key initiatives in line with priorities. The Council has been securing affordable housing for the City through planning policy, aiming for 25 per cent of all housing projects. This has subsequently been increased to 30 per cent and the Council has further plans in place to meet this growth. The 2002 housing needs survey identified the requirement for 332 affordable homes to be built each year; the Council has delivered around 150 homes each year between 2001/02 and 2005/06. A recent sub-regional housing market survey suggests that this will need to increase if the growth aspirations for the City are to be met.
- 82** The Council is beginning to address some local and global environmental issues. There has been a strong focus on improving previously poor recycling rates. It is now on target to recycle 28 per cent of all household waste by the end of 2006/07. Having previously neglected urgent waste disposal issues, the council has now developed short and medium-term solutions which are providing it with additional time to explore longer-term options.

- 83 The Council has improved the quality of the physical environment. For example, through its successful Business Improvement District, it has improved the street scene, such as cleaner streets, new street furniture and introducing police community support officers. The Council is on track to deliver on its LPSA targets to narrow the gap between the area with the worst street cleanliness standards and the overall City-wide performance. In addition, noticeable physical improvements include the creation of good quality public open space in the City centre, by removing an under-pass and replacing it with a street crossing.
- 84 The Council has introduced schemes to reduce reliance on the car and is encouraging the use of its park and ride facilities. At the same time it has improved its bus shelters and introduced real-time travel information. It is trying to reduce the number of cars in the City centre, has developed home-zones in its new housing projects and has school travel plans in a third of its schools. However, despite investments in public transport, usage is falling.
- 85 The Council has introduced some transport measures which support the economic development of the City. For example, the significant A386 Northern Corridor scheme is complete, combining improvements to the airport facilities with improved traffic flow and the City's third park and ride service.

Safer and stronger communities

- 86 The Council is committed to tackling crime and the fear of crime; one of its strategic objectives is to promote community safety. It has undertaken an extensive crime audit with its partners and encouraged greater reporting of crime. Until recently, it has not been good at following through data analysis with action to reduce crime levels, and has not met its targets for crime reduction. It is now addressing these weaknesses. In 2005/06, there were 13.6 domestic burglaries per 1,000 households, placing the Plymouth CDRP in the best 25 per cent of performers nationally. The Partnership is also amongst the best performers nationally in relation to robberies per 1,000 persons and theft of a motor vehicle per 1,000 persons. The Council is on track to achieve its LPSA target to reduce vehicle crime. Over the past year, it has reviewed crime reduction and reshaped the CDRP with its partners - it has an external lead officer for crime reduction and it has linked the work of the CDRP more closely with that of the LSP's Safer and Stronger Group. A partner now takes the lead on each of the main crime issues affecting the community - criminal damage, violent crime, burglary, and vehicle crime - and partners are now starting to challenge each other to reduce crime levels.

- 87 The Council is effectively managing anti-social behaviour (ASB) - for which it has a clear policy and action plan. The Council's ASB service is well regarded locally and nationally because it intervenes early in problem areas by introducing diversion initiatives, engages partners well, adopts a multi-agency approach to problem solving and has a robust enforcement procedure. Several projects, including the 'phoenix' and 'petal' projects have helped people in the community to improve their behaviour towards others. The work of the ASB unit is having an impact - for example, criminal damage on bus shelters has reduced from 44 incidents to 20 incidents a month, during the last year.
- 88 The Council is not doing enough to tackle alcohol and drug abuse in the City. There is no strategic focus on tackling alcohol and drug abuse and incidents of misuse are not reducing. Drug offences have increased by 30 per cent in the period 2002/05 and 90 per cent of arrests for violent offences are alcohol-related. The Council is currently reorganising its management arrangements for this area of work and has appointed a new director for the merger of the Drug and Alcohol Team (DAAT) and Community Safety Partnership who will oversee both groups. This supports the greater strategic focus needed to improve this area of work.
- 89 The Council works well with partners and the community to reduce accidents - particularly in relation to the death and injury of children. It has met its ten-year target and has reduced the number of incidents by 80 per cent (the national average reduction is around 40 per cent). It is now setting more challenging targets to promote further reductions. Several good initiatives have led to improvement, including the recently launched child road safety audit and work with schools on travel plans.
- 90 Up to date emergency arrangements are in place, although the Emergency Plan has not been updated to reflect the new management arrangements within the Council. The plan outlines responsibilities of the Council and partner agencies and allows the Council to respond to emergencies, support emergency service partners and communicate effectively with the public about the emergency at any time, while continuing to deliver critical public services. The Council's business continuity plans are being developed. It has regularly tested its arrangements with its partners and is jointly developing an improved electronic communications system - Rapid Reach - which will replace the warning and informal protocol arrangements now in place. It also has arrangements with neighbouring councils to provide mutual assistance in the event of an emergency.
- 91 The Council has improved its approach to building stronger communities by creating a new social inclusion unit, but activity is currently not well co-ordinated. It does not have an overarching community cohesion strategy which is clearly understood by all people inside and outside the Council. A clear focus on this area is important as the Council pursues its ambitious growth agenda for the City, in order to develop strong sustainable communities and assure access and equality for all local people.

Healthier communities

- 92** The Council and its partners have identified the key health priorities for local people. 'Health' is one of the theme groups within the LSP and is led by the Primary Care Trust (PCT). There are significant health inequalities across the City, with a clear link between health and deprivation. Key challenges include increasing life expectancy and reducing the incidence of circulatory disease and cancer. The main focus is on reducing these identified health inequalities and closing the gap between the most and least deprived areas; to date, local initiatives have had a limited impact on these priorities.
- 93** Current strategic partnerships with health and voluntary sector partners are new and the opportunities for maximising the impact of working together have not yet been fully developed. The FTAP for health identifies that the Council has an important role in promoting public health. Although the Council engages well with the health agenda, a more robust and systematic way of ensuring that all opportunities are utilised is needed. Health targets have historically been seen as a PCT responsibility and reducing health inequalities is not effectively mainstreamed across council departments.
- 94** Agencies are beginning to work effectively to improve outcomes for children and address child health inequalities and deprivation. Support for families is good, with universal health screening by the health visitor service. Support and information provided for pregnant women, new mothers and families is good. Targeted projects, such as SureStart and the Latch On group, work effectively to increase the low numbers of breastfeeding mothers.
- 95** Although the 2005 FTAP for health does identify some improvements in circulatory disease, cancer and life expectancy, these are largely in line with national improvements rather than as a direct result of local intervention. However, the Council is now implementing initiatives which are beginning to have an impact on some of the contributory factors to poor health such as smoking. Immunisation rates are good and the smoking cessation team is working with pregnant women through the Sure Start programme to reduce the incidence of smoking. The proportion of expectant mothers who smoke has reduced since 2003/04. Plymouth is now lower than its comparator group, although rates remain higher than the national average.
- 96** Over half of all schools in Plymouth have achieved the National Healthy School standard and are now working towards the new standard. An interesting project is the Southway healthy eating initiative, a partnership between the Council's Parks services, Southway Allotment Association and several local schools. Under supervision, the children learn to grow vegetables and plants from seeds and eventually take the produce back to school to cook and eat.

- 97 The Council has increased participation in physical activity and is on track to meet its LPSA stretch targets. In addition the Council has taken part in a LEAP (Local Exercise Action Pilot) in partnership with the LSP, based on encouraging 13 to 14 year olds to swim more frequently. Access to free swimming was targeted at 1,200 young people who were selected using a multi-agency approach based on criteria including obesity, deprivation and asthma. This was followed up with regular newsletters and engagement with participants. Final national evaluation is in progress, but local evaluation indicates a significant increase in participation and increased health benefits. Funding for the £200,000 scheme ends soon, but partners have agreed to continue with some elements of the scheme.
- 98 Overall, there have been few joint initiatives between leisure and health. Exercise on prescription (also known as GP referral) is under-developed across the City. In part, this reflects the lack of council-run gym facilities, in a City which has focussed predominantly on swimming provision. However, the recently opened gym at the new Brickfields leisure centre is already proving very popular and is running a GP referral scheme.
- 99 The Council is on track to achieve its LPSA target for drug treatment. Drug treatment services consist of partnership arrangements between the Prolific Offenders Unit, Arrest Referral Initiative, Harbour, the Council's Substance Mis-Use Assessment Team (SMAT) and the Drug and Alcohol Team (DAAT). There has been a large increase in the participation of problem drug users in treatment and a high proportion of users successfully sustaining or completing treatment programmes. Local stakeholders remain concerned about alcohol abuse.
- 100 There is a downward trend in the number of teenage conceptions (an LPSA target). However, there was a slight increase in numbers last year. The Council and its partners in the Teenage Pregnancy Unit are focusing their attention on 'hot spot' wards and 'at risk' groups, while continuing to support the overall strategy of reducing teenage conceptions.
- 101 Forty two per cent of public sector and 25 per cent of private housing does not currently meet the decent homes standard. Current Council plans aim to meet the standard by 2013. The Council currently takes more than two months to bring a vacant council property back into use and re-let. Although turnaround times have begun to reduce, the Council is still one of the worst performers in this area when compared with others nationally. The Council also has an LPSA target to improve the quality of private housing, but looks unlikely to meet this. Although the level of unfit private sector housing has reduced by more than a third over the last five years, almost 5,900 homes remained unfit in 2005. Good quality housing is a key part of the health agenda and the Council is not currently delivering on its priorities.

- 102** In the promotion of healthier communities and the narrowing of health inequalities, although the Council has begun to engage more regularly with the community, it has not systematically reshaped services to take account of the views of service users from excluded groups. However, there are some ad-hoc examples of where it is using engagement to change the way it delivers its services and meet the needs of particular groups. It recently agreed to arrange for exclusive access to a pool, which will allow Muslim women unable to participate in mixed sessions, to enjoy swimming. It has also made provision for traditional Chinese ceremonies to take place in council cemeteries in response to requests from that community.

Older people

- 103** The Council does not have a strategic approach to older people, beyond that in place for health and social care. However, their needs are considered at a service level. Although 'older people' is a cross-cutting theme within the new LSP, there are no clear targets against which to measure progress. The focus of the Council and its partners has been on social care and more recently, promoting independence, choice and well being.
- 104** The Council is starting to work with partners in a more methodical way to ensure that services for older people are more joined-up and effective, but progress has been slow compared with some other councils. Together with partners, it submitted a POPP (Partnerships for Older People Projects) bid in an effort to move this forward. The overall tenor of the bid was that the partnership saw older people as vulnerable and needing help; there was little about empowering them to be active citizens and allowing them to influence matters outside of the health and social care agenda. However, the bid was unsuccessful and partners do not have a strategy to take this forward.
- 105** The Council is providing political leadership in this area. It has appointed a councillor as its Older Person's Champion, to represent the council on a wide range of forums across the city, including the inter-faith forum. The champion also has a remit to raise awareness about the needs of older people across all service areas - a role made more challenging because the Council has not mainstreamed the older person's agenda. There is no clear officer lead on older people, other than for social care. However, leadership is provided on specific older person's issues through the Assistant Director of Community Care Services and the Council's Social Inclusion Unit. Apart from housing, benefits, health and social care, many officers are unaware of the potential contribution they could make to this agenda. Consultation and feedback is sometimes sought from older people using ad-hoc focus groups in areas such as planning and transport but there is no consistent approach or overall strategy to inform decision-making in this area.

- 106 The Council uses voluntary sector organisations to access the views of older peoples, but the main focus of consultation is on care services. The Older Person's Programme Board is a single body which directs service developments for older people across the PCT, Acute Hospital Trust, social services with representation from supporting people and the voluntary sector. Together with the Senior Citizen's Forum it submitted the failed POPP bid mentioned above.
- 107 The Council has increased the take up of benefit by older people through a successful campaign entitled 'Tell Granny/Granddad'. This was part of a wider campaign to ensure that people received the benefits they were entitled to and resulted in a total increase in take up of around £6 million.
- 108 The Council is working with health partners on improving older people's health, to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions. There have been significant reductions in delayed transfers of care. The Council is beginning to shift away from focusing predominantly on providing residential care services and has started to close residential care homes. This has released funding to invest in greater intensive care support, enabling more people to live at home for longer. This is helping the Council to meet its LPSA target to improve the quality of life and independence of older people.
- 109 Joint working between the Council, PCT and the Plymouth Guild has improved support to carers. A Carers' Strategy is now in place. Around 850 carers have signed up with the Guild and benefit from better information, a befriending service and carers' awareness training, and a range of other initiatives.
- 110 The Council does not have clear plans to promote inter-generational understanding. This is an issue which will become increasingly important if growth ambitions for the City and for the University are realised, attracting a younger population who want to be part of a European-style culture.

Children and young people

- 111 Outcomes for children and young people are adequate. The Council and its partners have set out an ambitious shared vision and strategy for improving outcomes for children and young people. Children and young people have consistently been prioritised by the Council, with significant financial investment above government guidelines. Council services for children and young people merged in 2005, and more vigorous strategic partnership with other agencies is becoming more effective. Trust arrangements are on track to be in place by 2008.
- 112 The Council and its partners are beginning to work together to address significant health inequalities and deprivation. The National Healthy School programme is developed and effective. Looked after children's health needs are addressed well, although the percentage of annual health assessments which have been completed has reduced in the last year. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who attend mainstream schools have long waits for therapies, and equipment.

- 113** Significant concerns regarding safeguarding were identified in CSCI Children's Services Inspections in 2003, 2004 and 2005. A contract with a Strategic Partner identifies clear targets for working with the Director of Children's Services to develop quality children's social care services. The arrival of the Strategic Partner in May 2006 is enabling good progress across the range of children's services.
- 114** The work to safeguard children is now adequate. Child protection processes are appropriate, but numbers of referrals for family support have increased, leading to poor completion of assessments within timescales. Work to further embed the Child Concern Model, and review thresholds for intervention by agencies other than social care is required in order to sustain the improvement already achieved. Services for looked after children and care leavers give good support. Some work with children with complex needs is of good quality but lacks a multi-disciplinary approach.
- 115** Most children and young people enjoy their education and attend school regularly. Attainment is improving at all key stages, the gap in attainment between the most and least deprived areas narrowing. There are good initiatives to improve behaviour and attendance and for reducing exclusions. Looked after children are supported well and achieve better than similar groups nationally. There is a well conceived strategy for identifying learning difficulties early and promoting inclusion. Children with diagnosed medical conditions are well supported but support is more variable for children with behavioural or emotional problems. Provision for children who are unable to attend school is of variable quality. There is an adequate range of sport and recreational opportunities but a lack of suitable play facilities for children with disabilities.
- 116** There is effective work to enable children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. Children and young people are receiving much good support in managing change and challenges in their lives. Numbers of young people entering the youth justice system and numbers of school exclusions have reduced. However, opportunities for children and young people to give their views are not sufficiently widespread and are not yet making sufficient difference to decision-making. Whilst there is some good practice in youth services provided directly by the council, the overall service is inadequate. Most looked after children contribute to their reviews, although the council is seeking to improve this, especially for children aged four to eight years. There is a good advocacy service. There is some good support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make a positive contribution, and this is a stated priority for improvement. Respite and extended care services for the families of disabled children and young people, and arrangements to support young carers are insufficient.

- 117 The Council's work in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate. Partners provide good support to children and young people in continuing in education and training. The provision of work experience, personal development and enterprise for young people is very good. The levels of young people not in education, employment and training are reducing, although remain high in some of the most disadvantaged areas. The 14-19 strategy is well considered and is being updated. Partnership and collaboration across 14-19 provision is improving. However, mechanisms to develop the curriculum across Plymouth are currently ineffective and performance management in schools across post-16 provision is inadequate. Sharing and analysis of data is insufficient. Work based learning and entry to employment are good. Local communities, including young people, are appropriately involved in regeneration.

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 Plymouth City 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.