

Corporate Assessment Report

December 2006



Corporate Assessment

Cumbria County 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 The Council is performing adequately overall. There is a clear vision for the county which is being strengthened with the introduction of the Local Area Agreement. The Council has focused its capacity on achieving its priorities and has successfully brought about significant improvements over the last few years. Clear outcomes have been achieved for example in the local economy and for community safety but the county-wide approach to health, including prevention of ill health, is yet to be agreed and implemented.
- 6 The Council and its partners have set a clear vision for what they want to achieve for the future. The Cumbria strategic plan *Sustainable Cumbria* sets out the shared vision for the county, which includes improving the local transport network, building a vibrant and diverse local economy, developing high-quality tourism and removing the inequalities in opportunities and living standards that exist in key areas of Cumbria. The shared vision for improving health in the county is at an early stage of development, which reflects the lack of engagement of primary care trusts in the partnership in the past. The shared vision for the county is based on a sound understanding of the community's needs, although there needs to be a greater consistency of approach with respect to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. This consistent approach should build on the Council's work with migrant workers and improved information sharing with partners.
- 7 The Council is providing strong community leadership for Cumbria. The Leader and Deputy Leader are prominent as county representatives on external bodies. The Council has an established framework of local committees and neighbourhood forums, which engage with local communities to address local issues. It is recognised as speaking with an authoritative voice for the benefit of Cumbria.
- 8 The Council has the capacity needed to deliver on its ambitions. There are sound plans in place which successfully guide the Council's resources and the Council is building the financial capacity needed to deliver its improvement agenda, while also adequately managing future risks. Partnership working is adequate with commercial partnerships strengthening the Council's capacity. Some processes to ensure that the capacity of the organisation is used effectively, such as human resource management, are developing but are not yet embedded across the Council.
- 9 The Council is providing leadership on the diversity agenda within the county and a more systematic approach to engaging with diverse communities is being developed. However, this is from a low base and the Council recognises that it needs to do more to understand the diverse needs and aspirations of Cumbria's changing population. The Council's approach to user focus is not yet fully developed, there are some good examples of services being redesigned to meet user needs, but the Council does not involve users in service design and delivery as part of a consistent approach.

- 10 The Council has strong political and managerial leadership, which is having a positive impact on its internal culture. The improvement agenda is being led from the top of the organisation. Communications have improved and this clarity and style is also building a culture of trust with partner organisations.
- 11 Overall, the Council is providing value for money, but there are areas of the Council's services which are high cost and not high performing. There is a clear focus on achieving savings with £13 million efficiency savings achieved, compared with the Gershon target of £6 million for 2005/06. However, in comparison with other local authorities, the Council's costs are generally high and the processes for systematically benchmarking, reviewing and improving value for money are underdeveloped.
- 12 The Council and its partners have successfully contributed to improving the local economy, for example through the focus on local issues affecting farming and the nuclear industry. The Council has worked well with the Urban Renewal Companies (URC) such as West Lakes Renaissance, and with the Rural Regeneration Company (RRC) to strengthen the economy. They have successfully attracted European funding to create jobs.
- 13 The Council and its partners have successfully reduced crime in Cumbria. Burglary and robbery, and theft from vehicles, have decreased significantly. Successful initiatives with partners have also resulted in fewer offences being committed by prolific and priority offenders. There is less fear of crime in Cumbria than the national average.
- 14 The Council is performing adequately in the provision of services for children and young people. Overall outcomes are adequate but there is variation between areas reflecting the county's socio-economic diversity. There have been improvements in provision in children's social care and the youth service; which were areas of weakness. The Council's capacity to improve outcomes for children and young people is good.
- 15 There remain areas where the Council and its partners need to move forward at a faster pace so that the public feel the benefit of changes in priority areas. The Council has been slow to make a real difference on the waste agenda. Poor performance on waste is placing the Council at risk of significant financial penalties but it has recently undertaken a policy review and is now diverting resources into this priority area. The Council has a consultation draft of its older people's strategy in place but has not translated this into action plans that will have a real impact on people's lives. The Council is making some positive contributions to the health of local people, but its approach is at an early stage of development and there is no overall county-wide health improvement strategy.

Areas for improvement

- 16 The Council and its partners should seize the opportunity to address health inequalities across the county that is presented by the newly established single Primary Care Trust (PCT) for Cumbria. Joint strategic planning on health issues is underdeveloped at present but the Council's involvement in the restructuring process sets an environment where this work can take place.
- 17 The Council should address the major issues in transport and waste management that have a substantial impact on people's lives, by sustaining recent improvements in performance. This includes reducing the high incidence of deaths and serious injuries from traffic accidents, building a transport network that meets the needs of both a vibrant tourist industry and a sparsely distributed population and making real headway on the previous poor performances around waste generation.
- 18 The Council and its partners should ensure that the planned redrafting of *Sustainable Cumbria: 2004 to 2024* enables them to set a quantified vision for the county, which is aligned with the Local Area Agreement and enables robust strategic resource and action planning to deliver improvements. This will need to reflect an improved, shared understanding of community needs and priorities, including those of minority groups, built on improved information systems and intelligence being commonly available across all partners.
- 19 The Council needs to strengthen its internal management systems at a faster pace, focusing particularly on:
 - human resources (HR) processes, at both strategic and operational levels. The Council has been working to improve its approach to HR but it needs to fully embed the new HR policies and ensure managers are fully trained to implement them;
 - performance management, particularly across partnerships. This is developing but is not fully and consistently integrated across the Council and its partnerships;
 - risk management, which is strong in some areas but it is not consistently applied across all plans and strategies; and
 - sharing learning, to ensure that the good practice that exists in some directorates becomes common to all.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	2
	Prioritisation	2
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2
	Performance management	2
What has been achieved?	Achievement	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** Cumbria is the most north-westerly area of England, bordering with Scotland to the north. It is England's second largest county and the third most sparsely populated. It is an area with many contrasts. Perhaps best known as the location of the Lake District National Park, the largest national park in England, the county also has an extensive coastline and embraces parts of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Cumbria is also at the centre of the UK's nuclear industry, with over 60 per cent of the UK's radioactive waste stored in the county. This diversity brings population, economic and environmental pressures, which impact directly on the Council's services and the challenges it faces.
- 21** Cumbria has a population of 495,000, is largely rural and has only two communities with populations above 28,000. In the ten years to 2005, the county's population increased by 2.5 per cent and there were significant changes in the profile of the overall population. For example, at the end of this period there were 13.5 per cent fewer children aged under - 10 but 16.5 per cent more adults over 70. By 2028, it is forecast that a third of the population will be retired. Most of these people will live in areas of the county that are comparatively difficult to access, putting additional pressures on health and social care services in particular. Cumbria has a comparatively low ethnic minority population, which is common in sparsely populated areas. There is an increasing migrant worker population. Over 99 per cent of its population is categorised as white.
- 22** The local economy has struggled to keep pace with the rest of the country although there are more recent signs of improvement. Cumbria had the lowest economic growth rate in the UK between 1998 and 2003 due to the contraction in heavy manufacturing industry. The tourism industry accounts directly for 18 per cent of all jobs and the local employment level is above average. However, jobs in tourism are, generally, low paid. This, along with the increase in housing prices, heightened locally by the attractiveness of the Lake District, leads to a significant problem in providing affordable housing for local people. The county's second largest employer, the nuclear industry, faces potential job losses of 8,000 over the next 10 years. Cumbria will soon have its own university, due to open in 2007, which is aimed at helping to address the local skills gap as well as increasing the number of young people in the area.
- 23** A significant local problem is moving people and goods around this area of outstanding natural beauty. Local people rely heavily on cars and use of public transport to get to work is at less than half the national rate. About 14 million people visit the lakes each year and 90 per cent of those travel by car. The limited road network has, therefore, a significant impact on all aspects of life in Cumbria. Improving access to and from Cumbria's west coast, and to the motorway network, are priorities.

- 24 Some areas of Cumbria rank amongst the best in the country for living standards, and employment, but others are amongst the worst. Crime and the fear of crime are both comparatively low in Cumbria, although there are local crime hotspots. The health of the county's population reflects its diversity and history, with West Cumbria and Barrow doing less well than the national average in key health indicators such as life expectancy, cancer mortality and coronary heart disease.

The Council

- 25 The Council has no overall political majority, with 39 Labour, 32 Conservative, 11 Liberal Democrats and 2 independent councillors. Since 2001, the Council has been controlled by a Conservative/Liberal Democrat administration. The Cabinet has 10 portfolios, based on the priorities for improvement set out in the *Council Plan*. The Scrutiny Management Board, with six scrutiny panels and a Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, linked to Council Plan themes, oversees the Council's scrutiny function.
- 26 The Council recognises the diversity and dispersal of Cumbria's population and has made specific arrangements to engage with the local different communities. There are six local committees, which have delegated executive and financial responsibilities in areas of particular local interest such as highways and young people. There are also 63 neighbourhood forums to facilitate communication between local people, elected councillors, the district councils and agencies such as the police.
- 27 The Council has gone through significant change over the last few years. When the county area was hit by foot and mouth disease in 2001, the Council put its effort into dealing with the crisis the community faced. This increased pressure on the Council coincided with performance and service failings, and together these challenged the Council's ability to modernise and keep up with changing requirements. The Council recognised the need for change and so put into place an improvement framework which was based on cultural change, and strengthening of policy, process and partnership working.
- 28 The Council's management team is comparatively new, with the Chief Executive leading on the recruitment of five chief officers since 2004. The Council employs nearly 19,000 people, and has the equivalent of 13,500 full-time employees. The 2005/06 net budget was £503 million. The budget for 2006/07 increased to £532 million, which includes £247 million schools funding, which is ring-fenced. The Council has lobbied successfully for additional funding from sources such as EU and UK structural funds. In 2005/06 the Council spent £64 million on capital investment schemes, more than in any previous year.
- 29 The Council has developed commercial partnerships for the delivery of services and, currently, has three contracts let to external partners costing £53 million annually. These contracts cover services such as the highways, human resources (HR) and information and communications technology (ICT) support services. A similar contract covering waste management is being considered.

- 30 There are six district councils; Allerdale, Barrow-in- Furness, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland in the county. The local PCTs have recently been reconfigured into a single PCT for Cumbria, which has the same boundaries as the Council.
- 31 The Comprehensive Performance Assessment assessed the Council as a fair authority in 2002 and as a weak authority in 2003. The Council voluntarily received support from government agencies to help it improve. In 2005 it was assessed as a one-star authority that was improving well.

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

Ambition

- 32 The Council is performing adequately in this area. There are clear ambitions, shared with partners that address most of the local issues in Cumbria. These are being enhanced by the redrafting of *Sustainable Cumbria*, which is being informed by the development of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). This is strengthening joint working on health, starting to set clear outcome targets for the vision and improving data sharing between partners. There is strong community leadership from the Council which is focusing effort on improvements for the community.
- 33 The Council and its partners, who together comprise the Cumbria Strategic Partnership, have set a vision for what they want to achieve for Cumbria by 2010. This vision is set out in *Sustainable Cumbria 2004 to 2024*. It is that Cumbria will be a place that:
- celebrates its diversity, creativity and heritage;
 - engages everyone in the mainstream of community life;
 - retains and attracts the skilled and talented;
 - participates to the full as a competitive sub-region;
 - strengthens its infrastructure;
 - makes a positive contribution to the wealth of the North West; and
 - marries economic growth with social progress and environmental protection and enhancement.
- 34 The partnership vision addresses most of the major local issues for Cumbria. For example, it aims to improve the local transport network, build a vibrant and diverse local economy, develop high-quality tourism and remove the inequalities in opportunities and living standards that exist in Cumbria. However, despite some significant health inequalities, the shared vision for improving health in the county is underdeveloped. This reflects the lack of engagement of PCTs in the partnership in the past.

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- 35** The vision provides an overall sense of direction which is shared by the partners and provides a focus for improvement. However, it does not set a specific and measurable Agenda for Change that clarifies and quantifies what the partnership wants to achieve. Firm plans are in place to redraft and re-issue *Sustainable Cumbria* in April 2007. The new vision will be shaped by the emerging Local Area Agreement (LAA) which has been developed through the Cumbria Strategic Partnership (CSP), in consultation with other organisations and partnerships. The emerging LAA, due for completion in March 2007, complements the partnerships current priorities and has drawn on the Community Strategies of all of Cumbria's Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). This has strengthened partnership working across the county. The evolving LAA identifies a range of outcomes which, in addition to economic and environmental ambitions, include improvements in health such as reducing alcohol consumption and obesity to improve the quality of life for people in Cumbria.
- 36** There are clear and challenging ambitions for the future set out in most of the key partnership plans which support the achievement of *Sustainable Cumbria*. For example, the *Sub-Regional Economic Action Plan* aims to create over 6,500 jobs, develop over 850 new business creation opportunities and assist over 3,800 people to improve their skills. In addition, more than 5,000 skills development opportunities will be provided over five years following the establishment of the University of Cumbria. There are also challenging ambitions to reduce crime and disorder across the county by 2008. These ambitions are set out in *Building Pride and Respect*, the safer stronger communities fund (SSCF) agreement for Cumbria, which has been agreed with a range of partners. These strategies provide clear and measurable outcome targets so that partners have been able to plan effectively to achieve the vision.
- 37** The Council has defined a clear and ambitious agenda for its own role in Cumbria's immediate future through its *Council Plan*, 'Building Pride in Cumbria' The plan identifies the Council's role as an important partner to other agencies and as a significant service provider. The Council's mission statement is founded on six aims:
- improving Council services;
 - making Cumbria more prosperous;
 - improving health and wellbeing of adults;
 - improving the life chances and wellbeing of children and young people;
 - creating safe and secure communities; and
 - creating and protecting a high-quality environment for all.

- 38 The Council is effective in its community leadership role. It lobbies hard to ensure that Cumbria remains high on the agenda of regional partners, such as the North West Development Agency. The Council's Chief Executive and Leader work well with others on key strategic issues, such as nuclear decommissioning, to ensure that Cumbria is well-positioned for the future. The Council is represented on regional and local bodies and the Council's partners say they recognise the Council's mission of 'Building Pride in Cumbria' as exemplifying Cumbria's ambition for the future. The authority provides a county-wide voice and focus for activity that ensures resources are focused on a common agenda.
- 39 The ambitions are based on a sound understanding of the community's needs. The Council consults regularly with communities through its citizens' panel (Community Voice), public meetings and web-based consultation. It has been innovative in its engagement with some priority groups such as young people. However, the Council has been inconsistent in its approach to engagement with BME residents. Some valuable research has been undertaken to inform strategy development, in areas such as economic development, community safety and the post code analysis of educational attainment. However, there is a lack of sharing of intelligence between partners such as the Council, health and police, with no common database of information about communities. This makes it difficult for the Council and its partners to gain an up-to-date and comprehensive picture of the quality of life, trends and changes across Cumbria.

Prioritisation

- 40 The Council is performing adequately in this area. There are clear priorities that underpin the ambitions and meet the needs of most of the community. The framework for the delivery of the priorities through the thematic groups of the partnership, the *Council Plan* and service and team planning is sound. The medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) focuses resources on delivery of the priorities but the budget processes are not sufficiently robust to ensure that budget levels align with service commitments.
- 41 There are clear priorities in place which underpin the ambitions for Cumbria. The Cumbria Strategic Partnership (CSP) has identified nine priorities. Some of these relate to areas of Cumbria with particular needs, such as Barrow and West Cumbria, and the Lake District National Park. Other priorities focus on the county as a whole including sustainable communities and wellbeing, creating wealth and a diverse community and celebrating Cumbria. These county-wide priorities link to the priorities identified in the *Council Plan*. This ensures that the Council and its partners are working to a shared agenda and focusing resources on the areas in need of development.
- 42 The Council's priorities reflect national and local issues. The Council's priority of 'creating safe and secure communities' embraces government's expectation that crime will be reduced by 15 per cent between 2005/06 and 2007/08. The priorities also balance the needs of different areas in the county. For instance, developing Furness Business Park is part of an overall aim to reduce deprivation in targeted wards.

- 43 The priorities reflect the needs of the majority of local residents. The Council arrived at its priorities after taking into account the results of consultation, surveys and research through neighbourhood forums. All policies are reviewed to ensure the needs of rural communities are taken into account. Community cohesion and diversity are prioritised within the 'improving council services' agenda, and are integral to all other priorities. In the 2005 Community Voice survey, 59 per cent of residents said the Council keeps them very or fairly informed, compared with 24 per cent in 2003. The Council has made some progress in understanding and addressing the needs of BME communities, including migrant workers. For example, the Council is building its understanding of the needs of migrant workers by taking personal details and noting the issues raised from individuals when they visit council offices. However, there is still work to be done to better understand the needs of BME communities. Equality impact assessments for all services are not due to be completed until December 2006. Until these assessments are complete the Council will not know if the needs of all of its communities are being prioritised effectively.
- 44 The Council has a sound strategy in place to deliver the priorities. The CSP priorities are led by themed groups within the CSP, with clear action plans for delivery. The actions the Council has agreed to deliver are featured in the Council's plans and strategies. For each council priority there is an action plan that identifies one top aim and some secondary aims in the short to medium-term. These are supported by SMART targets. The activities in the *Council Plan* are translated into service plans which provide the process to ensure delivery. There are links between directorate and team service plans, and to the staff appraisal processes which is being strengthened. Staff are clear about the Council's priorities and they understand how their roles contribute towards achieving these. Performance against priorities is discussed in team meetings and in meetings with line managers. This framework helps the Council to focus its attention on ensuring these priorities are delivered and helps individuals understand how they contribute to delivery of priorities.
- 45 There are strong arrangements in place to ensure the short-term priorities for improvement are addressed. The *Tactical Delivery Plan* covers improvement priorities for 2006/07. There is clear accountability for activity through named officers and performance against the plan is managed through themed performance groups and the corporate performance group.
- 46 The Council has also taken steps to ensure its key commercial partners play an important role in the planning process. Joint business plans have been produced with some external commercial partners and performance management frameworks put in place. This ensures the activity of key commercial partners also supports the delivery of the Council's priorities.

- 47 Resources are targeted to deliver priorities. The Council's MTFS is adequate to underpin Council priorities, but is limited both in terms of links with other agencies and the links between revenue and capital. The MTFS has detailed plans for year one and broader projections for years 2 and 3. It allocates resources according to priorities, including to areas that need to improve, such as waste, ICT and human resources, while limiting council tax rises. The Council's reduction in reserves to the minimum recommended level, means that budget provisions must be fit for purpose and financial management arrangements must be robust. However, budgets have not been managed robustly as there were significant spending variances in 2005/06; adult services underspent by £2.5 million and children's services overspent by £2 million.
- 48 Councillors are willing to take some difficult decisions to ensure that resources are targeted at priority areas. Savings were identified from the schools' meal service and transferred to the delivery of youth services. The Council also introduced charging for home care services and money was taken out of school clothing grants. The savings made were targeted to areas identified for improvement.
- 49 The Council does not always clearly define the outcomes it is looking to achieve and how these link to the priorities. Local committees have £13 million delegated funds from the highway revenue budget, to support highways maintenance. The committees were not required to link the use of this budget to reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads or to specified improvements in the condition of roads. The Council has recognised the need to link this spending to identified priorities and local committees will be required to produce business plans by April 2007 to ensure a clear fit between corporate and local priorities.

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

Capacity

- 50 The Council is performing adequately in this area. There is good political and managerial leadership and effective partnership working. However, key processes to ensure that the capacity of the organisation is used effectively, such as human resource management, are developing but are not consistently in place.
- 51 The Council demonstrates effective political leadership and there is a focus on delivery of the *Council Plan*. There are arrangements to ensure clear political accountability of the cabinet. Cabinet portfolio roles have been revised to align with Council priorities for example a portfolio holder has been identified as champion for older people. The Standards Board has provided training to address conduct and dignity issues and this has clarified member roles, responsibilities and behaviours. Regular tripartite meetings, attended by cabinet members, directors and chairs of scrutiny, discuss strategic and service issues and help maintain the focus on priorities.
- 52 There is strong and effective managerial leadership by the Chief Executive and other senior officers. A new Corporate Management Team, in place since November 2005, is focused on important strategic issues and works collectively to resolve challenges. This enables the Council to stay focused on what is important. Previously underperforming services have been improved and inspectorates have generally assessed services as having promising prospects of improvement. The Council's scheme of delegation demonstrates clear accountability and decision-making in addressing its improvement priorities.
- 53 Scrutiny arrangements have made a good contribution to policy development through project reviews; however, their role in scrutinising performance is underdeveloped. Valuable project reviews have been undertaken on topics such as teenage health, road safety, waste management and domestic violence. Scrutiny panels do not consistently receive and review resource and performance reports and as a result this information is not reviewed in public. Non-executive councillors and other stakeholders have limited opportunity to use scrutiny to challenge and secure service improvement, due to the lack of public and regular performance review.

- 54 Training of councillors is satisfactory. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) has worked with the Cabinet to develop a cohesive political leadership team. An extensive member induction programme is complemented with individual development plans. Although 54 of the 81 councillors have a training plan, the training and development of councillors is not linked to a review of their performance and progress towards the North West Charter for Member Development has been slow.
- 55 The Council has increased its ability to improve services by targeted restructurings, which have built corporate capacity and improved staff morale. Internal communications have also improved, particularly via the intranet, newsletters and the highly visible 'meet Pete' Chief Executive sessions.
- 56 Partnerships are being used to build capacity. The Council played an important role in the improvement of their partnership working with local district councils through the development of the Cumbria Local Authorities Strategic Board (CLASB). This is a forum for the Leaders and Chief Executives of all local government bodies in Cumbria to meet to agree the way forward on issues of mutual interest. The Achieving Cumbrian Excellence (ACE) initiative has strengthened relations between the county and the district councils, and by collaborating they are adding to each others' capacity. The group is also exploring issues such as shared services to build capacity and reduce cost.
- 57 Partnerships with the voluntary sector are adequate. The Council is working with the voluntary sector to access BME, disabled and other vulnerable residents. There is a service level agreement in place between the Council and AWAZ, the BME forum for Cumbria, which aims to ensure the voices of BME residents are heard and their needs addressed. The Council has worked with the voluntary and community sectors to improve access to affordable transport for community groups. The voluntary sector is involved in the CSP, but does not yet feel fully engaged in the planning process. The compact agreement with the voluntary sector has recently been revised to improve commissioning, support and collaborative arrangements. The Council clearly recognises that working closely with the voluntary sector strengthens its understanding of community needs. The new agreement aims to maximise the benefit of this joint working.
- 58 The Council has strengthened its capacity through the use of procurement. Externalising services has enhanced delivery of the Council's priorities. The civic amenity site contract has improved performance on waste minimisation. The Council's strategic ICT partnership has given social workers access to portable IT and the Council has expanded its intellectual capacity through this externalisation. However, it has only very recently quantified the savings achieved through this procurement route, and reviewed the value for money achieved. The Council has modernised its procurement systems and processes. Procurement activity has been reorganised to benefit from electronically accessed systems and a new procurement strategy developed, which provides a sound foundation for improvement.

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- 59** The Council has a comprehensive risk management strategy, but this is not yet applied consistently across directorates and in partnership working. The Council identifies risk at different levels including strategic partnerships and these are linked to performance reporting through the Council's risk management system. Corporate risks were reassessed in 2006. A minority of service plans and key partnership plans identify potential risks without identifying how these will be managed or mitigated.
- 60** The Council is taking the appropriate steps to ensure it has the financial capacity to deliver its future agenda. Potential future financial risks are being appropriately managed through the identification of savings and by seeking borrowing consent from central government. The Council is also carrying out service reviews to identify scope for savings in 2007/08. The Council is successfully adding to Cumbria's resources by securing European funding and working closely with the North West Regional Development Agency to secure government grants. The strengthening of Cumbria Vision, the regeneration partnership between local government and the NWDA, ensures that additional regeneration funding is applied for in a co-ordinated way to support partnership priorities.
- 61** Overall, the Council is providing adequate value for money. There is a clear focus on achieving savings with £13 million efficiency savings achieved, compared with the Gershon target of £6 million for 2005/06. The service reviews undertaken in 2006 had a clear focus on value for money but the outcomes of the reviews were not apparent at the time of the inspection. There are areas of the Council's services which are high cost and not high performing.
- 62** A project management framework has been introduced but the framework is not consistently applied in all directorates. The Invest to Save and Improve (ISI) initiative followed good practice with a full-time project manager and a project sponsor, supplemented by external support to add expertise in areas where the Council recognised it had skills gaps. However, robust project plans are not in place for other important initiatives such as the current approach to the world heritage bid.
- 63** The Council's human resource management is underdeveloped and plans to implement job evaluation are moving slowly. Human resource management has been identified as an improvement priority and the Council is working to improve its approach. However, the Council's People and Workforce Development Strategies, which were finalised in mid-2006, are not as robust as most council plans, having limited quantifiable SMART improvement targets. Nor do they fully address the future demands and implications on the workforce of partnership working. The Council has recruitment and retention problems and sickness absence increased from 8.7 days lost per full-time equivalent (FTE) in 2004/05 to 9.16 days in 2005/06. Notwithstanding this, the workforce has responded positively to council actions to address the 2005 staff survey findings that internal communications were poor. Staff generally feel better informed and the adoption of seven core values provides clear expectations about behaviours.

- 64 Adequate arrangements are in place to address the needs of BME staff who work for the Council. The Council recognises the benefits of having a workforce that reflects the local population. The proportion of council staff from BME communities, including those at higher levels, reflects the local population. It has employed a corporate equality officer, mainstreamed equality and diversity through the HR strategy, approved an equality policy and set itself a significant improvement target in its equality standard to move from Level 1 to Level 5 by 2010.
- 65 The current approach to user focus is not yet fully developed. The Council's six local committees demonstrate its commitment to locality working and participative democracy. Their functions, and the Council's approach to user focus, are being reviewed in the light of an independent study, the Democracy Commission review commissioned by the Council and the Local Government White Paper. Some services are being refocused to meet the needs of users and there is some involvement of users in service development and evaluation. However, this is not undertaken as part of a consistent approach. For example, the Commission for Social Care Inspection's report on social care services for older people identified that users were not systematically engaged in the design of services.

Performance management

- 66 The Council is performing adequately in this area. It has addressed former weaknesses by investing in the development and effective implementation of its corporate performance management processes. Performance management is contributing to service improvements in a number of priority areas, but the processes are not yet fully integrated and outcomes from good performance management are not yet evident across all services. The performance management of commercial partnerships, which encompass many of the Council's services, is effective. However, the Council's performance management of some more complex and small scale partnerships is underdeveloped.
- 67 The Council's approach to performance management is strengthening from a low base. It has introduced a robust electronic monitoring system which is providing a clearer framework for monitoring the Council's performance. This has been supported by training for managers over the last 18 months and this has resulted in overall improvements in a number of council services. The Corporate Performance Group monitors quarterly the key corporate performance indicators (PIs) and the Council's annual *Tactical Improvement Plan*. This process is underpinned by thematic performance groups, which monitor and challenge service performance in more detail in line with corporate priorities, including Local Performance Service Agreement (LPSA) indicators and relevant Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs). This monitoring is based on a corporate traffic light system highlighting variances in performance.

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

- 68** Performance management is contributing to improvements in the Council's overall performance. Between 2004/05 and 2005/06, 64 per cent of BVPIs improved. In particular, there has been a successful focus on improving poor performing services, with the number of PIs in the worst 25 per cent falling from 42 per cent in 2003/04 to 29 per cent in 2004/05. There are also examples of the Council targeting resources to underperforming and priority services such as social care, waste and transport, resulting in recent improvements in the performance of these services. However, overall the level of progress is in line with national rates of improvement rather than closing the gap in performance.
- 69** The Council has not fully integrated risk management into performance management. For instance, monitoring of action plans at senior levels of the Council is not based on an explicit assessment of the levels of risk to the Council or partnership priorities and objectives.
- 70** The Council has not implemented its staff appraisal process consistently. The framework is sound, with individual targets linked to service plan and corporate priorities, but progress towards including all staff in the framework has been slow, with large variances between services. Only a reported 58 per cent of staff received a staff appraisal in 2005/06; however the true performance is likely to be higher due to underreporting of appraisal completions on the Council's IT system. These flaws in the implementation of the staff appraisal system weaken the Council's ability to ensure that staff focus on the effective delivery of its priorities.
- 71** The Council uses external challenge as part of performance management and improvement and it reacts positively to external assessments. It has improved adult social care and youth services following poor inspection results and has used external evaluation and consultancy to drive performance.
- 72** The Council is managing its main commercial partnerships effectively. There are partnership boards for the Council's main contracts, which meet quarterly and are attended by senior managers and cabinet members. The Council takes a strong and clear client role and is continually reviewing and improving its monitoring arrangements. Contracts include national, corporate and local performance indicators and incorporate financial budgeting. This provides some indication of value for money in areas such as waste management and highways. These arrangements help to ensure that contracted services reflect corporate priorities.
- 73** However, the Council does not systematically review the effectiveness of all its partnership arrangements and service level agreements. It has recently analysed its ISI initiative, the first time it has done so in the three years since the initiation of the scheme. Systematic evaluation of projects and partnerships would help the Council remain focused on its desired outcomes.

- 74 The Council has established a broad range of service standards, which are accessible to the public. There is a corporate approach to complaints monitoring and the Council has made it easier for the public to register their comments. Satisfaction with the handling of complaints is high at 70 per cent. However, information on complaints is not used effectively by officers or councillors to challenge performance. The management of complaints through partnerships and contractual arrangements is fragmented and complaints are not subject to detailed monitoring or reported consistently. As a consequence, opportunities for service improvement and corporate learning by addressing concerns are being missed.
- 75 Performance information is not being shared effectively with the community in order to challenge and drive service performance. Comprehensive information is available on the Council's website but this is not being shared effectively through the Council's local participation arrangements, such as neighbourhood forums and local committees. The Council is not making the most of the opportunities afforded to tailor local services to local needs and strengthen local decision-making.
- 76 Financial performance information is being regularly reviewed. Budget monitoring reports are reviewed monthly by the Corporate Planning Cabinet Working Group. Quarterly account summaries provide clear links to corporate priorities and include trend analysis, the implications of variances and a developing approach to the monitoring of costs alongside service performance. The piloting of a balanced scorecard in Children's Services is also strengthening the Council's focus on value for money and there are clear plans to roll the system out across the Council. This combining of service and financial performance strengthens the Council's management of value for money, but this is at an early stage of development.
- 77 Target setting and achievement against targets is adequate. Targets have been set for all corporate PIs over a three year period to 2009, many of which are stretching. However, the Council only reached 48 per cent of its 87 key PIs targets in 2005/06. The Council's LPSA targets are generally challenging but performance is mixed; of the 32 targets in the agreement in 2006, 62 per cent achieved the maximum reward grant level, 38 per cent did not achieve the performance required for the minimum reward grant. Twenty-two per cent recorded deteriorating performance from the start of the agreement.
- 78 The Council is not sharing learning effectively. The ISI shares knowledge effectively between projects but learning has not been translated corporately. Similarly, there is a wide variation in the ways in which the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) at district council level use information to develop their community safety strategies. Some are using data and information at a sophisticated level to target crime reduction initiatives, but others don't. The good practice displayed by one scrutiny group in analysing performance indicators has not been replicated across all scrutiny groups. This means that the Council is not maximising opportunities to work either internally or with others to compare and evaluate processes, costs and outcomes.

What has been achieved?

- 79 The Council has performed adequately in this area. There are areas of strong performance for example in economic development and community safety. However, there are also areas, such as health and waste, where the Council and its partners recognise they need to move forward at a faster pace so that the public feel the benefit of change.
- 80 The Council and its partners have successfully secured jobs to help build a sustainable economy and attracted economic investment to the area. They have identified areas of potential unemployment and been proactive in putting plans in place to reduce the impact of the loss of jobs for example in the nuclear industry.
- 81 The initiatives introduced to improve community safety have also had a positive impact. Between 2004/05 and 2005/06 burglary and robbery reduced by 17 per cent and theft from vehicles by 26 per cent, which is better than the national average. Although violent crime rose slightly in the same period, the rise is below the national average and the general trend is downwards.
- 82 The Council is performing adequately in the provision of services for children and young people. Overall outcomes are adequate but there is variation between areas reflecting the county's socio-economic diversity. There have been improvements in provision in children's social care and the youth service; which were previously areas of weakness.
- 83 To support the development of sustainable communities, a new housing strategy has been developed with partners that provides an agreed approach on a number of housing issues, including affordable housing. The Council has also improved the efficiency of the local transport network but further developments are required if the Council and its partners are to have a significant impact on the way people and goods move around Cumbria. Plans are in place to address this both in the short-term and the longer-term for example through the investigation of a potential bridge to cross Morecambe Bay.
- 84 The Council knows the areas that need to be developed further through its strategic and service level planning and its performance management arrangements. It has spent time on resolving structural issues, turning around some core services, such as adult social care and ensuring the future is being built on a consensus approach by working successfully with partners.
- 85 However, there remain some key areas where the Council needs to move forward at a faster pace. These are starting to be addressed at a strategic level but it will take some time before the public sees the real benefits of a more co-ordinated strategic approach.
- 86 The current performance on waste management is poor but the Council has recently invested in this service resulting in some recent improvements in performance. However, the Council is still collecting more household waste per head of population than most other authorities and there is a high proportion of waste still going to landfill sites. The Council is progressing a contract with a strategic partner to address this problem.

- 87 The Council is making some positive contributions to the health of local people, such as helping to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies. However, its approach to addressing ill health and health inequalities in Cumbria is not yet developed. There is no overall county-wide health improvement strategy and the Council's plans for the intervention and prevention agenda for older people are still at an early stage.
- 88 There are linkages between the Council, county-wide and national priorities. The Council's work with its partners on the evolving LAA is helping to crystallise shared priorities for the future, ensure a better balance between local and national priorities and focus the partnership arrangements. Information sharing is improving and organisations are better placed to work together.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 89 The Council is contributing effectively to improvements in the local economy. It mainly does so under the umbrella of Cumbria Vision, the partnership established to take forward the economic regeneration of Cumbria. The proportion of Cumbria's residents of working age who are in employment is higher than the national average but wages are comparatively low in part reflecting the impact of the tourist industry. The proportion of those unemployed is lower than the national average, but long-term unemployment is rising faster than the national average. There are marked differences in employment levels across the county and there are local master plans to address these employment issues. There are also initiatives to assist key parts of Cumbria's economy such as the nuclear and farming industries and deprivation in West Cumbria.
- 90 The Council and its partners are securing jobs to sustain the local economy. To lessen the impact of the potential loss of 8,000 jobs in the nuclear industry, the Council and its partners successfully attracted the nuclear decommissioning agency to Cumbria. This has supported the establishment of Cumbria as a centre of excellence on nuclear issues. An inward investment campaign targeted primarily at US contractors bidding for major parts of the UK nuclear clean up industry has attracted 20 companies employing over 500 people to West Cumbria. Established local businesses have also benefited through this boost in economic activity. Capital investment at the West Lakes site alone has exceeded £25 million in the last three years since the preliminary announcement.
- 91 The Council and its partners are successfully addressing problems in the local economy. Weaknesses in the economy highlighted by the foot and mouth outbreak, led the Council and its partners to establish the Rural Regeneration Cumbria (RRC). This is the first rural regeneration company in the country. It has so far attracted £6.2 million European funding. Under the RRC, Farming Connect Cumbria has been established to facilitate innovation, and to improve efficiency and competitiveness in global markets. As a result of this initiative, farmers are being provided with targeted support and business advice. To date, 1,500 farmers have been registered and 1,400 of these have been allocated an adviser. Business reports and environment reports have been completed for more than two-thirds of those registered and 500 grants averaging £9,000 distributed.

- 92 Local people have been supported successfully to return to work by the Council and its partners. A pilot project was aimed at helping back to work, sick and disabled people in receipt of benefits and living in the 20 per cent most deprived wards in Allerdale and Copeland. The Council supported over 180 of these people to gain employment, substantially exceeding its LPSA target of 120.
- 93 The way in which young people aged 11 to 19 are helped to prepare for working life is good. The Summer Learning and Skills programme has successfully introduced considerable numbers of young people to post 16 opportunities, with over half achieving accreditation for some aspect of the programme. Schools are also supporting young people in developing skills, enhancing their employability and financial literacy.
- 94 The efficiency of the local transport network has been improved but the major changes needed to address some fundamental problems, are yet to be delivered. Local bus services have been improved through new and expanded bus routes, including better co-ordination of rail and bus services, and through the introduction of more low access buses suitable for people with mobility problems and carers with push chairs. The 'wheels to work' project has improved access to employment for Cumbrian young people by providing them with scooters. Finalised highways developments include the extension to the A66 trunk road that improved access to south-west Cumbria. Further work is underway to improve access to Cumbria's west coast and the links with the motorway network. The Council is also proactive in lobbying for a new high speed national west coast rail service. The Council recognises that an improved transport network is vital for a successful Cumbrian economy and for sustainable communities. The Council has started a review of transport to develop a more strategic approach.
- 95 The Council's performance on environmental issues is poor. The Council is still collecting more household waste per head of population than most other authorities and there is a high proportion of waste still going to landfill sites which places the Council at risk of significant landfill taxes in the future. The Council and its partners have been slow to address waste issues but there are now firm plans to secure a commercial partner to provide the services needed to drive improvement. The Council undertakes sustainability appraisals that assess new policies for their social, economic and environmental impact and long-term sustainability. These have included the *West Lakes Community Strategy*, wind energy supplementary planning guidance and the developing LAA. Green transport initiatives and Local Agenda 21 grants to get communities involved in renewable energy and recycling initiatives, have helped the Council to address the environmental sustainability issues. The Council is also a proactive partner in the potential bid to recognise the Lake District National Park as a world heritage site.

- 96 The Council is working with the housing authorities to address Cumbria's priority need for affordable housing. It has participated in the development of Cumbria's first *Sub-Regional Housing Strategy*, covering the period 2006 to 2011, which provides a framework for consistent policies and practices across the county. This strategy, published in October 2006, includes plans for over 1,000 affordable homes over the next five years. The Council works closely with the district councils helping to deliver programmes in support of this overall aim, such as land reclamation, brokering deals and strategic planning.

Safer and stronger communities

- 97 The Council, working with CDRPs, has contributed to a reduction in crime. Between 2004/05 and 2005/06 burglary and robbery reduced by 17 per cent and theft from vehicles by 26 per cent, which is better than the national average. Although violent crime rose slightly in the same period, the rise is below the national average and the general trend is downwards. The Council led the development, with other stakeholders, of a county wide community safety strategy, *Building Pride and Respect in Cumbria 2006/07* which provides a strategic approach to crime reduction. Early successes include more reporting of incidents of domestic violence and fewer offences by prolific and priority offenders.
- 98 The fear of crime is lower in Cumbria than the national average, but reductions in recorded crime have not led to a corresponding reduction in this fear. The Council has implemented initiatives to reduce the fear of crime such as developing the neighbourhood watch, tackling doorstep crime and encouraging people to report domestic violence. However, these initiatives are not strategically linked to promoting public reassurance and their impact on reducing the fear of crime is difficult to quantify.
- 99 The Council understands the requirement to consider and incorporate crime reduction into all its activities but is just starting to implement this. It issued a booklet to raise staff awareness in all directorates of the contribution they make, and could potentially make, to crime reduction. Although this is having an impact in services, the approach is not embedded across all Council policy, planning and service delivery, so the Council is missing opportunities to have a greater impact on crime reduction.
- 100 The Council and its partners are reducing anti-social behaviour in areas of concern in Cumbria. There is a multi-disciplinary framework which includes the use of acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs) and anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs.) Working with partners, the Council has developed local solutions to concerns about anti-social behaviour. For example, youth disorder calls to the police, in a problem area in South Lakeland, were reduced by 20 per cent after a youth shelter was provided. ASBOs have been avoided on several occasions by developing solutions at the local level. However, the fear of anti-social behaviour remains high.

- 101 The Council has not demonstrated effective leadership of Cumbria's Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) and there is no strategic approach to delivering a drug and alcohol strategy. The DAAT adopted safer drinking as a priority in April 2005, but has not targeted alcohol reduction effectively. There have been some safer drinking campaigns, such as 'Night Safe' which has reduced town centre violence in West Cumbria, but these were not part of a strategic approach. The Council is starting to have a more strategic involvement in the DAAT and a rewrite of the draft *Alcohol Strategy 2005/08* is planned. Young people who need drug treatment for the first time can access it faster, and people are now staying in treatment for longer. Despite this, on average, people have to wait longer to get into treatment than the national target. An initiative in Carlisle and Eden that helped prolific and priority offenders, many of who have substance misuse problems, has led to a 30 per cent reduction in their offending.
- 102 The county's performance on improving road safety is inconsistent and the numbers killed and seriously injured on the county's roads remains amongst the highest in the country. The Cumbria Road Safety Partnership now provides a more effective focus on safety. There are initiatives such as the county-wide speed indicator device programme, and a focus on working with young people aged 16-25 who comprise 21 per cent of the total of all those killed or seriously injured. People killed or seriously injured on Cumbria's roads reduced from 447 in 2004/05 to 434 in 2005/06, but the number of young people under the age of 16 killed or seriously injured increased from 46 to 53 in the same period. Slight injuries also increased by 2.7 per cent. The overall reduction is better than its national target, but Cumbria will not meet its LPSA stretch target for 2006.
- 103 The Council works effectively with partners to support the safety of its local residents. They have assessed the risks attached to vulnerable, at risk and 'hard-to-reach' groups and targeted them with advice and support, for example by delivering multi-lingual fire safety advice leaflets to migrant workers and developing the no cold callers scheme.
- 104 The Council is well-prepared to deal with emergencies. Following the storms and floods in Carlisle in 2005, emergency planning arrangements have been strengthened. This includes the purchase of satellite phones to ensure effective communication, and the establishment of a council emergency planning group to ensure business continuity. The group works with the voluntary sector to provide support services for vulnerable people, and has tailored its emergency arrangements to meet a diversity of needs. Leaflets are available in community languages and interpreters are available. The Council is recognised nationally as an exemplar in dealing with floods and storms.
- 105 The Council's approach to building stronger communities is underdeveloped. There are effective community engagement processes in place, particularly through the neighbourhood forums and positive action is taken to reach 'hard-to-reach' groups through the voluntary sector. However, the Council and its partners have yet to articulate a shared understanding of what a stronger community means in the context of Cumbria. Without this shared vision, it has been difficult to set objectives and measurable targets.

Healthier communities

- 106** The Council is making some positive contributions to the health of local people although its approach is at an early stage of development and there is no overall county-wide health improvement strategy. The need for a well-planned health strategy is evident in the health challenges facing Cumbria's residents. Life expectancy is just below the national average, but with geographic variations and a significant gap between the most affluent and deprived. Cancer mortality rates are higher than average for people in Barrow and for women in Allerdale. Deaths from heart disease are higher than the national average in all but one of Cumbria's districts and a particular problem for women in Eden. Children's tooth decay is significantly worse than the England average.
- 107** The Council is working with partners on health matters through its leadership of Cumbria's LAA and has demonstrated its knowledge of the health inequalities issues. Binge drinking is significantly lower than the national average but the number of alcohol-related stays in hospital is significantly higher. In addition, indications are that there is a high proportion of obese adults. Only 18.9 per cent of adults are believed to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day and the lowest incidence is in the urban deprived wards. These key issues of alcohol-related admissions and the upward trend in obesity are being addressed through the evolving LAA. However, clear targets for improvement have not been set yet.
- 108** The PCTs in place before the health service restructuring reported good working relationships with the Council, which had improved over the past two years. However, the Council has struggled to fully engage with health on the joint approach to improving outcomes which has resulted in, for example, an inadequate focus on health in the *Sustainable Cumbria* strategy. More recently, the Council has been active in shaping the new health structure through its support for a single PCT and its involvement in the appointment of a new chief executive.
- 109** Activity to promote healthier communities in Cumbria has been predominantly at a district council level rather than county focused. For example, in South Lakeland on fuel poverty and in Barrow on obesity, smoking and heart disease. This is reflected in the results of the stakeholder survey where only 43 per cent of stakeholders believed that the Council works effectively to improve and support the health of the community. The Council has promoted health awareness among its staff. Smoking cessation campaigns, blood pressure checks and encouragement of an appropriate work-life balance through the removal of core working hours are making an impact, but these initiatives do not have quantified outcome targets and do not target particular areas of the Council's workforce.

- 110** Despite tackling successfully some local health issues, the Council and its partners have yet to take effective action on some major problem areas. For example, there are now fewer teenage pregnancies in Cumbria and people's needs are now being better met when they leave hospital. Health scrutiny acknowledges good progress in improving mental health services for adults. However, solutions to some health challenges are underdeveloped. There are estimated 2,300 problem drug users in Cumbria with only half in treatment, considerably higher than national standard waiting times for prescribing and detoxification and inadequate levels of treatment capacity and after-care support. Arrangements for funding the joint provision for learning disability, by the Council and health, have been problematic with a £2 million shortfall in 2005/06. Although a partnership agreement has been drawn up for 2006/07, it has not been prioritised and is limited to a single year.
- 111** Services to promote healthy children are adequate. The Council is working well with health in progressing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and teenage health by raising teenagers' awareness of sexual health issues as well as teenage pregnancy planning and commissioning. The 100 per cent take-up of the Schools Fruit and Vegetable Scheme for four to six year olds is an example of the impact of healthy eating initiatives in Cumbria's schools. Increased physical activity is being developed in partnership with health and district councils through the Cumbria Sports Partnership with 24 community sports coaches delivering through school hubs and the Cumbria Youth Games.

Older people

- 112** The Council's strategic approach to dealing with the intervention and prevention agenda for older people is not yet in place. The Council has a draft older people's strategy, which covers the health and wellbeing of older people in Cumbria, but this has not yet been translated into a detailed and resourced action plan or shared and agreed with partners. The draft strategy covers 2006 to 2009 and was issued for consultation in March 2006. The strategy does not quantify the improvements in older peoples' lives that the Council is aiming to achieve. Until it does so, the Council will not be in a position to work with partners to resource, plan and deliver the actions needed, in a co-ordinated way.
- 113** The Council understands the changing nature of Cumbria's population, with marked increases forecast in the numbers and proportion of older people. The impact on council services, both in terms of resources and in the well-informed demands of this sector of the population, is likely to be dramatic. The Council has begun to transfer resources to match this increasing demand, but does not have a longer-term projection of the potential further resourcing that will be needed, or how this will be provided by itself and its partners.

- 114** The Council does not consult effectively with older people. There are examples of consultation with older people through established channels, such as the voluntary sector and established organisations. For example, following consultation with older members of the BME community, through the Cumbria Multi-cultural Centre, an older women's aerobics class has been created to improve their opportunities to participate in healthy physical exercise. There were also strong consultation arrangements in place for the Direct Payments Steering Group and the Carers Strategy Group. However, these were the exception and a systematic approach is not yet in place. The Council did not set a time limit for the end of the consultation period on the Older People's Strategy which may deter people from responding promptly.
- 115** The Council understands that improving the health and wellbeing of older people requires the co-operation of many different people and organisations, both across the Council and externally. Within the Council, there are older people's champions in Cabinet and within each directorate.
- 116** The Council is working closely with the fire service to improve the safety of older people in their homes. Over 8,000 home fire safety checks have been carried out, which has led to a 65 per cent reduction in injuries caused by accidental fires over the past three years. Fire service officers also provide older people with additional support such as advice on benefits and pensions and can act as an advocate for people in difficulty.
- 117** Cumbria is sparsely populated so the Council and its partners are supporting the independence of older people at risk of social isolation. They have established 'host family day care', which provides day care for older people in a family environment. This is improving the contact that people have within their local communities.
- 118** The Council and its partners are also supporting older people who are vulnerable, to remain living in their own homes. The Telecare service, which is being piloted jointly with some district councils, provides a sophisticated alarm system based on the individual needs of each older person.
- 119** The Council has taken action to improve older people's access to services and social events. The rural wheels project, which uses school minibuses and voluntary sector transport to facilitate access to services by older people. This has enabled those living in isolated areas access services more easily.

Children and young people

- 120** The Council is performing adequately in the provision of services for children and young people. Overall outcomes are adequate but there is variation between areas reflecting the socio-economic diversity. Senior leadership is good and there is strong political commitment to continuing to improve outcomes for children and young people. Ambition is strong and there is effective partnership working through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. There have been improvements in provision in children's social care and the youth service; which were previously areas of identified weakness. Education services perform well. The Council currently provides adequate value for money in its delivery of services to children and is appropriately targeting funding to priorities. The Council's capacity to improve outcomes for children and young people is good.
- 121** The new Corporate Director has acted swiftly to establish a new management structure to deliver integrated preventative services; but this is not yet fully embedded. There is a well-defined strategy for service development. A range of pilot activities has been successfully implemented to demonstrate new ways of working. There are clear and appropriate priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan. However, the plan was not based on a sufficiently detailed analysis of need, some performance measures lack precision and the number of young children involved was too low. However, overall performance management is adequate with a clear structure for monitoring, reporting and challenging service performance. The management of the children services authority is adequate.
- 122** The Council's partnership working with health services is improving. Schools and early year's providers collaborate well with health professionals to promote healthy living. The Council contributes significantly to multi agency initiatives targeting particular problems such as teenage pregnancy. The provision of residential respite care for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is inadequate.
- 123** On the evidence gathered by the joint area review, children and young people appear safe. The most vulnerable children are protected effectively. Overall outcomes for looked after children are adequate. However, access to early support services is inconsistent and some young people from BME backgrounds are unable to access services that are sensitive to their cultural needs. Services for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have improved and are adequate, but some aspects of joint working are underdeveloped. The support for young carers is inconsistent. Arrangements to manage the provision of care have improved, but there remain areas for further improvement.

- 124** The Council contributes to an effective strategy for child care and early year's education. The majority of schools are good or better. Standards of attainment are generally slightly above the national average. Pupils achieve well in the majority of schools. The Council provides effective support for school improvement and to encourage school attendance. The majority of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well in schools and looked after children's attainment is slightly above the low national rates. However, the attendance at school of some looked after children is too low. Overall there is good provision for leisure and recreation, but the strategies to encourage the participation of the most vulnerable young people are underdeveloped.
- 125** Young people make good progress in their personal and social development and many make a positive contribution to the development of their schools and local communities. The involvement of young people in the development of council services and plans is improving, but this is not yet consistent across the Council or local communities.
- 126** The Council is working effectively with partners to support young people in achieving economic wellbeing. The strategic approach to planning for 14 to 19 provision between the Council and its partners is very good. The number of young people, who are not in education, employment or training, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is low. Although adequate action is taken to ensure that young people, particularly the most vulnerable, have access to suitable housing, the provision of emergency housing is inadequate and some young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are unable to access suitable housing.

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 Cumbria County Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 4 September 2006 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.