

Corporate Assessment Report

December 2007



Corporate Assessment

Derbyshire 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 Derbyshire County Council is performing well. The 2002 corporate assessment commended the Council on achieving radical change over the preceding years. Few weaknesses were identified and the Council achieved the highest rating. Since then it has continued to build on its strengths and made good progress in improving those areas highlighted by the corporate assessment as needing improvement. It is an effective, stable organisation with a reputation built on trust and solid partnerships. Derbyshire received a 'four star' Comprehensive Performance Assessment Rating by the Audit Commission in 2006.
- 6 The Council and its partners have agreed an overall vision of 'improving life for local people'. Four key areas have been prioritised in the Sustainable Community Strategy (2006-2009) to address current challenges. These are: to reduce anti-social behaviour, engage young people in positive activities, tackle obesity and ensure a clean and attractive environment. The Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) set out challenging short term targets for the area. Strong partnership working and effective consultation and community engagement have resulted in clear ownership and a sound, shared understanding of the ambitions and priorities. The Council recognises there is now a need for greater political involvement in looking to the more distant future and demonstrating increased community leadership and influence in shaping the future of Derbyshire as a whole.
- 7 Managerial leadership is visible, effective and highly regarded both within the organisation and externally with partners. There is a clear and consistent culture of trust and respect that has enabled the Council to show effective leadership and build strong partnerships to address local challenges.
- 8 The Council has modernised its structures and has a significant change management programme underway to pull together an ambitious but overdue programme of service re-engineering covering back-office functions and front line service delivery. It has developed an integrated call centre 'Call Derbyshire' which is well regarded by local people and improves access to services.
- 9 Political leadership is effective. Roles and responsibilities are clear and there is a strong focus on consensus which works well. There is good political participation in partnerships and the governance structures for the LAA and the Local Strategic partnership (LSP) are effective. Scrutiny is effective in supporting decision making and improving services.
- 10 Derbyshire has a robust approach to financial management and, as a result, has strong financial capacity and sufficient levels of reserves to provide for the future. There is a strong focus on value for money (VFM) and an extensive change management programme has resulted in service improvements and savings. It has a robust approach to procurement and some effective approaches to securing improvements such as electronic purchasing and a local procurement initiative. Staff are enthusiastic, committed and many are long-serving.

- 11 The Council does not have a sufficiently strategic approach to diversity and human rights issues. While there are a wide range of diversity projects taking place, overall the Council's approach is limited and lacks coherent leadership having focused on issues of race, disability, gender, and sexuality. In Derbyshire there are challenges around rural isolation, poverty and building cohesive communities which are not considered effectively.
- 12 The Council is managing performance effectively. There is a culture of challenge and debate and a focus on achieving solutions. Councillors and partners are effectively involved in managing performance and there is an annual cycle of performance and resource planning. The Council responds well to customer feedback and complaints in shaping service delivery and compares its services and systems to others to discover more efficient ways of working. There is scope to improve the value of learning by developing a systematic approach of sharing learning across the organisation. More consistent target setting would improve performance management of individuals and enable the Council to reward good performance as well as manage underperformance more transparently.
- 13 The Council has delivered strongly against its over-arching priority of delivering high quality services. Service quality is very good. Derbyshire performs better than many county councils and is continuing to improve performance. With its partners it has delivered improved community outcomes in priority areas and achieved nine out of twelve stretch targets in its Public Service Agreement. The Council and its partners have been successful in making people feel safer and reducing burglaries. Focusing road safety measures on key routes has reduced fatal and serious motorcycle accidents by 29 per cent and neighbourhood projects are having a visible impact. The Council has been successful in engaging with older people through its 50+ forums, and supporting more vulnerable adults to live independently. Adult social care is rated as excellent. Outcomes for children in Derbyshire are good. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well and children and young people achieve well and are safe. Looked after children are well provided for, and while they continue to perform less well at school than other children the gap is narrowing. The Council has successfully worked with partners to improve recycling and rates in Derbyshire are on track to meet statutory recycling targets.

Areas for improvement

- 14 The Council should work with partners to develop a clearer vision for the future of Derbyshire so that local people and stakeholders understand what makes the place special and how community leaders are planning for the sustainable future of the area. The Council recognises within its Corporate Action Plan there should also be greater political engagement in new agendas such as the Government's focus on 'place shaping'. Derbyshire needs to demonstrate clear political direction and confident leadership to encourage innovation and raise aspirations. Councillors and senior managers need to be supported and developed to enable them to play this greater community leadership role.
- 15 The Council should develop a more strategic and corporate approach to diversity, equality and human rights, and demonstrate greater leadership around community cohesion. It should continue its work around race, disability and gender but expand its approach to encompass broader definitions of diversity such as poverty and rural isolation and consider how it can develop more cohesive communities. Celebrating diversity means focusing on difference and the extent to which public services acknowledge and respond positively, for example to differences in identity, location, between communities of interests, and within communities. Promoting equality means that the focus is on fairness and how public services address the needs of all sections of the community. Human Rights are about the treatment that local people encounter and whether or not individuals are being treated with dignity and respect. Good practice in diversity, equality and human rights is more than the compliance of public sector bodies with statutory duties; it is a significant part of good management and providing high quality services. A more forward-looking approach is now required so that the Council can plan for future demographic changes. Like many areas, Derbyshire is becoming home to new communities of migrants from Eastern Europe and it needs to consider more strategically how it can support the needs of these people and ensure that they are integrated into local communities. The Council needs to increase the pace at which it is carrying out Equality Impact Assessments and ensure that its methodology is fit for purpose through external challenge and review.
- 16 The Council needs to develop a more corporate overview of workforce planning to ensure that it is able to recruit, retain and develop talented staff to meet future challenges and address imbalances in the workforce such as gender bias at a senior level.
- 17 To enable the Council to measure the impact of its activities and initiatives a more consistent focus on evaluating outcomes is required. It should also consider how it can develop the existing performance management framework to measure the performance of individuals and enable better accountability for individual performance.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	3
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3
	Performance management	3
What has been achieved?	Achievement	3
Overall corporate assessment score**		3
*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

- 18 Derbyshire County Council is in the East Midlands region of England and covers 255,000 hectares. The population of the county, which does not include the city of Derby, is around 750,000 people. A large part of the north and west of the county is rural, much of it being within the Peak District National Park, and the population is dispersed in small, often isolated, rural settlements. In contrast, around 100,000 people live in the main urban area of Chesterfield. Ilkeston is the second largest centre with a population of around 36,000 and there are seven other main centres of population each with around 20,000 residents.
- 19 The County's population is predicted to increase by around 11 per cent between 2004 and 2029. There is a higher than average percentage of people of pensionable age – 20 per cent of the population is aged over 65 compared with the national average of 18.6 per cent. Around 2.8 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups which is below regional and national average. More recently small but growing numbers of people from Eastern Europe have begun to settle in the north-east of the county.
- 20 South Derbyshire is the fastest growing district in the county. This is mainly because of major housing developments and good transport links, closeness to East Midlands Airport and the inward investment and regeneration which has been influenced by the Toyota car plant at Burnaston.
- 21 Chesterfield and the other main towns have developed because of traditional industries such as coal mining, textile industries and engineering. The decline of many of these sectors, particularly coal mining and textiles, has had a significant impact on the area, both in terms of the environmental legacy, but also in the social and economic deprivation brought about by employment losses. Manufacturing still accounts for around a third of local employment. Within the rural areas there is a mixed rural economy increasingly influenced by tourism. The workforce is characterised by comparatively low skill levels and there are relatively fewer people in professional occupations. Wages are lower than in England as a whole. Educational achievement is below average with fewer numbers of school leavers gaining five or more GCSEs than similar areas, and attainment of A levels and degree/diploma level qualifications is lagging behind the regional and national averages.
- 22 Seventeen areas within the county are among the most deprived 10 per cent in England. While unemployment levels in Derbyshire are below the regional average there are pockets of high unemployment. There are relatively high numbers of people on incapacity benefit - a legacy of the coal mining industry. Life expectancy varies by as much as 17 years across the county and some areas have higher than average rates of poor health because of smoking, obesity and unhealthy lifestyles. Teenage pregnancy rates are above national averages in some areas.

- 23 Crime rates in Derbyshire are at the national average. Crime rates are compared nationally across Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership areas. 2006/07 data shows that crime rates were stable against the previous year. House burglary offences have reduced by 35 per cent in the last four years and vehicle crime has fallen by 30 per cent in the same period. Violent crimes are around the average but are increasing in line with the national trend.

The Council

- 24 The Council has had a Labour administration since 1981. The authority currently comprises 38 Labour, 15 Conservative, 10 Liberal Democrat and 1 Independent county councillors. There is a Leader and Cabinet governance structure with nine councillors each taking an executive lead for a strategic or service portfolio. The Conservative Group Leader occupies the tenth cabinet seat.
- 25 Scrutiny is arranged into four cross-party Improvement and Scrutiny Committees; Services for Children; Healthier Communities; Resources; and Sustainable and Safe Communities. Each Improvement and Scrutiny Committee is chaired by a non-executive member of the controlling party. Other Committees include a Standards Committee, an Audit Committee and two Regulatory Committees (Licensing and Appeals, and Planning and Control). There is also an Investments Committee and a Pensions Committee. All Committees are politically balanced.
- 26 Managerial leadership is provided by a Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive working with six strategic directors who are responsible for Corporate Resources, Children's Services, Adult Services, Environmental Services, Community Safety and Cultural and Community Services.
- 27 The annual gross expenditure for 2007/08 is over £1 billion (including schools) and the capital programme currently runs at £156 million per year. The Council employs 37,000 people (19,798 Full Time Equivalents) making it one of the biggest councils in the country and a major employer in Derbyshire. The Council Tax levied by the County Council for a Band D Property is £996.12 in 2007/08 which is lower than the average for shire county councils.
- 28 Partnership working is important to Derbyshire. The Derbyshire Partnership Forum is the county-wide Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). Delivery of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) is through four main boards and overseen by the LAA Board. The Safer Communities Board, Children and Young People Board, Healthier Communities and Older People Board and Sustainable Communities Board co-ordinate and oversee the strategic delivery of projects at a county, district and local level.
- 29 Derbyshire was selected as a pilot for the first round of Local Area Agreements and has recently participated in the 'dry run negotiations' for the new style of LAAs. The original pilot Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) contained 12 'stretch' targets which attracted a performance reward grant to the area of £8.8 million. The LPSA 2 contains 18 new stretch targets negotiated with government.

- 30** The Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) (2006 - 2009) sets out four cross cutting partnership priorities:
- reduce anti-social behaviour;
 - engage young people in positive activities;
 - tackle obesity; and
 - ensure a clean and attractive environment.
- 31** Derbyshire County Council received a 'four star' rating from the Audit Commission in 2006. Service performance is very good with both Environment and Adult Social Care performing strongly and Children and Young People and Culture performing well. The 2006 Direction of Travel rated the Council as improving well.

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

Ambition

- 32 The Council is performing well in this area. There is a clear strategic vision for the area which is 'for everyone in Derbyshire to enjoy a good quality of life, both now and in the future', and challenging ambitions have been agreed with partners. The SCS provides a robust planning framework and a clear focus on what matters most. Leadership is effective and based on a good understanding of community needs and the challenges facing the area. Consultation and communication are effective and the Council has developed good methods for engaging with communities, particularly those groups at risk of disadvantage. Partnerships are very effective. There is a clear culture of building consensus and strong relationships built on trust and respect. The Council recognises that longer term planning and political engagement with community cohesion and place shaping agendas is currently limited.
- 33 The Council and its partners have set out a clear vision which is translated into an aim that, by 2015, 95 per cent of Derbyshire residents will be satisfied with their area as a place to live. This vision is at the heart of the SCS for Derbyshire 2006 - 2009, the Council Plan, the LAA and the LPSA, all of which share a common framework built around the national shared priorities. There are good plans developed with partners setting out clear and challenging aims, such as the Children's and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and the Local Transport Plan and the county waste strategy. These plans support the focus on the four partnership priorities of the SCS. Clear plans support a sustained focus on what matters most and help the Council and its partners to make a real and measurable difference for local people.
- 34 The Council has been focused in addressing the economic and social deprivation brought about by the end of the coal mining industry in Derbyshire. It demonstrated good community leadership in focusing its energies and resources into securing the future economic growth of the area around Staveley and Bolsover with the development of Markham Vale on the site of a former coal mine and chemical works. The Markham Vale initiative will generate 5,000 new local jobs by 2015 and significantly improve road links with the creation of a new motorway junction. This has taken some time to achieve because of a judicial review which held up the planning process. By having a clear long-term vision and working hard to negotiate with partners the Council is well placed to achieve its ambitions around improving employment prospects in the area.

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- 35** The Council recognises that a vision for the future beyond the lifetime of the current community strategy is not clearly articulated. Political engagement with the new agendas such as local government's role in 'place-shaping' and developing stronger, more cohesive communities across the whole county is also limited. For example, there are no strategies or plans in place to address community cohesion and the current cultural strategy does not address issues around 'place' and local identity. Councillors have not had a good focus on these issues. Supporting them to develop this will facilitate a confident and more creative leadership in the future and can enable Derbyshire to further develop its community leadership potential and ensure long term plans address community needs.
- 36** Partnership working is very effective and there is a very clear common purpose and direction across the county partnerships. Ambitions are based on a shared understanding of local needs and the Council and its partners have a good understanding of the social, economic and environmental issues facing the area. The Derbyshire Partnership Forum was established in 2000 as the county Local Strategic Partnership to oversee the development and implementation of the first community strategy as well as delivery of the LPSA1 and2. The enthusiasm and commitment to partnership working was key to Derbyshire being selected as a LAA pilot and has contributed to the success of the partnership in delivering against PSA1 stretch targets. Similarly the reorganisation of the county into a single Primary Care Trust was achieved without disruption to services.
- 37** The Council uses effective community engagement mechanisms to understand the views and needs of its diverse communities. Directors, councillors and partners attend community forums, and fourteen older people's forums have informed Council strategies, plans and services. It has a comprehensive and well-thought-out consultation strategy which recognises the different approaches needed for consulting with BME communities or other communities at risk of disadvantage such as rural communities. Two forums have been established to engage BME communities. The consultation strategy sets out clear guidance for Council staff, offers practical and technical help and contains tools for effective consultation. A timetable ensures that 'consultation fatigue' is avoided as well as helping to reduce duplication. The Council's strengths in consultation mean that local people are more likely to feel that their views are being heard.
- 38** The Council communicates decisions about its ambitions well. Councillors, staff, partners and stakeholders understand the ambitions and are enthusiastic and committed to achieving them. The Council produces excellent leaflets, magazines, websites and other promotional material to communicate decisions about its ambitions and priorities to local people and communities. It takes care to target communications appropriately bearing in mind the needs of different audiences. For example, the Derbyshire Insight residents' newspaper is also available as a 'talking book' through an arrangement with the RNIB. A range of media are used and produced to a consistently high standard. For example, the 'b_line' magazine is targeted at teenagers, the Gold Card magazine is targeted at over 50's and there are regular publications for looked after children. These publications help to ensure that local people understand what the Council and its partners are trying to achieve.

- 39** The Council is providing effective leadership to address local challenges. Councillors and managers are willing to tackle difficult problems and take tough decisions. For example, by deciding to increase charges for school meals and amalgamating or closing schools due to falling numbers. There is a real and consistent culture of trust and respect and a focus on achieving results through consensus. This has resulted in an effective and a powerful management style that runs through the whole organisation. This has been dubbed locally as 'the Derbyshire way' and reflects a genuinely enabling style of leadership which is reflective of modern management thinking. This leadership style has enabled the Council to build strong partnerships and a shared ownership of issues.

Prioritisation

- 40** The Council is performing well in this area. The Council knows what matters most to local people and has developed its priorities to reflect these needs. Short to medium-term targets are outcome-focused and challenging and partners are involved in developing plans. Local action plans are in place to deliver the priorities. The Council has a strong and sustained focus on its priorities such as providing high quality local services. The political and managerial leadership are not distracted by operational matters. The Council and its partners allocate resources in line with priorities. To achieve a greater impact in the future the Council may need to focus its resources more closely around its key priorities.
- 41** The Council knows what matters most to local people and has developed its priorities to reflect their needs. Stakeholders agree the Council has clear priorities for action which focus on what matters to local people. The results of consultation have clearly shaped the priorities in the SCS. For example, local people have said that anti-social behaviour (ASB) is of concern and so reducing ASB is identified as one of the four key priorities in the Community Strategy. This means that local people are more likely to feel that they have a voice in shaping priorities and as a result have more confidence in the Council's leadership.
- 42** The community strategy is clear and explicit about the linkages between shared priorities. For example, activities within the safer and stronger communities priority aimed at preventing anti-social behaviour are linked to outcomes in other priority areas such as improving employment prospects or improving the local environment. This is how Derbyshire has ensured the community strategy is joined up and delivers added value.
- 43** Priorities take account of the needs of black and minority ethnic communities and other groups at risk of disadvantage. For example the children's information service is working with the Council's social inclusion team to identify the childcare needs of travellers and within adult social care the housing needs of black elders have been met. The Council is shaping services to meet the needs of particular groups such as children with special needs, those from low income families or from BME and traveller communities.

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- 44** Plans are realistic and robust and relate well to the ambitions set out in the community strategy. The Council Plan provides a clear framework for delivering the Council's priorities. There are links to national priorities, local needs and other corporate, service and financial strategies such as the Medium Term Financial Plan. There are clear targets for improvement which are largely outcome focused. Key strategic plans such as those for Older People and Children's Services have been based on sound analysis of issues and good consultation with users and stakeholders. Plans are regularly reviewed and updated so there is scope to respond effectively to the changing needs of communities and users. Partners understand their respective roles in delivery and plans are sufficiently detailed for partners and stakeholders to be confident that ambitions are achievable.
- 45** The Council has a comprehensive five-year financial plan that identifies forward budget pressures and strategies for delivering priorities within the resource framework. For example, revenue implications of major capital schemes such as the South Normanton Joint Service Centre are built into the Medium Term Financial Plan. The plan identifies future budget pressures such as funding agreements as well as service pressures such as waste disposal and recycling facilities, and the need to make efficiency savings. This helps to provide a robust planning and delivery framework to deliver priorities.
- 46** The Council and its partners allocate resources in line with priorities. The Council has reviewed and revised its resource allocation in line with its changing priorities annually. For example an extra £1m in revenue and £2.7m capital was allocated in 2007/08 to support improvements in the quality of life for looked after children. Additionally funding for diversionary activities within the Safer Derbyshire Partnership has been allocated to those areas with significant anti-social behaviour problems. Capital projects and bids for budget for growth are subjected to rigorous assessment of their contribution to council priorities and only undertaken where it is clear the desired impact will be achieved. This continual review of progress means the Council reassesses its spending plans and respond effectively to the needs of local communities.
- 47** The Council recognises that it needs to reassess its priorities in the light of government's spending plans and unquantified budget pressures. Some of its current levels of services may not be sustainable in a reduced spending environment. For example, elderly people in Derbyshire receive free home care services. The Council has already made some tough decisions such as closing rural schools. The Council needs to continue to make and stick to tough decisions and avoid other potentially damaging approaches such as 'top-slicing' budgets or applying universal or arbitrary cuts to balance budgets.
- 48** There are clear links between service plans and the overarching priorities in the community strategy and council plan. For example, the children and younger adults service plan for 2007 - 2009 links clearly to the CYPP, council plan, sustainable communities strategy and LAA and through links to the financial plan demonstrates that resources are available to deliver the priorities. This means that staff and managers understand how their work contributes towards the delivery of priorities.

- 49 Action is being taken to deliver the Council's priorities. The Council has continued to provide good services and this is recognised by high resident satisfaction rates and by stakeholders. Derbyshire was successful in delivering its first PSA targets and achieved an additional £8.8m in reward grant as a result. Local people benefited from additional levels of service provision which enabled the Council to improve key stage 3 results and reduce the number of schools with serious weaknesses. Elderly people received better home care and fewer were admitted to hospital. Public transport was improved and fewer people were killed or seriously injured on the roads. More care leavers went into employment or training. Targets have now been set for PSA2 which align with the new Sustainable Community Strategy.

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 well in this area. Managerial leadership is visible and effective. There are clear arrangements for accountability and decision making which are supporting continuous improvement in services. Capacity of staff to deliver priorities is good and there is a strong focus on training and development. The respective roles and responsibilities of officers and councillors are clear and there is a culture of trust and respect. The Council recognises that it now needs to build further capacity among its councillors to sustain strong leadership and challenge and take on new agendas. The Council is working very effectively with partners to build capacity and, as a result, is well placed to deliver its ambitions and priorities.
- 51 Managerial leadership is highly visible and effective. At a corporate level there are good management arrangements which support cross-cutting priorities and inter-departmental working. Corporate working is strengthened by central research, public relations and policy teams. These arrangements enable the Council to maximise its corporate capacity.
- 52 Decision making is timely and results in actions. There is an effective system of delegated decision making whereby Executive members make decisions in relation to their portfolio responsibilities in regular public meetings. These decisions are then reported to Cabinet. There is scope to improve the transparency of some decision making. For example, the clarity in recording key decisions in Children's Trust minutes to enable scrutiny and challenge by key stakeholders is insufficient. This has been recognised by the partnership and plans are in place to address this. Encouraging stakeholders and local people to get involved in local democracy aids better ownership and understanding of key decisions.
- 53 Scrutiny is rigorous and challenging. Scrutiny committees are chaired by non-executive volunteers from within the controlling party but there is full participation from opposition members in scrutiny reviews. Scrutiny contributes to service improvement, for example scrutiny reviews into services for alcohol abusers resulted in resources being targeted at treatment plans. Scrutiny is well supported by the officers with access to research, guidance and administrative support. Action plans are monitored and there is good external involvement with partners and stakeholders. Wider public engagement with the process both during and afterwards is under-developed and there is scope to publicise the work of the committees more widely. Better public engagement with decision making would enable local people to understand why decisions have been made.

- 54 The Council has a comprehensive and systematic approach to identifying and managing its strategic risks. It carries out an annual review and updates the strategic risk register to ensure key strategic and corporate risks are managed. This includes partnership risks, business continuity and ICT disaster recovery. It has refined its approach to give a more detailed analysis as the basis of service plans and budget and resource allocations. It also has a comprehensive and up to date business, corporate and service continuity plans which have been tested and are being refined. The Council is working with key partners to further develop business continuity to ensure delivery of public services in emergencies. This approach ensures risks can be effectively managed.
- 55 Councillors and officers are working well within the ethical framework and there are very few incidences of inappropriate conduct. The constitution is well established and understood. The Council adopted a revised Code of Conduct in June 2007. The Standards Committee and Monitoring Officer provide advice and training on ethical standards but do not have a high profile within the Council. The Standards Committee is not currently chaired by an independent member but is chaired by a member of the controlling political group. This goes against best practice. The Council will shortly be required by law to have an independent chair of its Standards Committee. There are no lay members on the Council's Audit Committee. Greater independent involvement in the work of the Standards and Audit Committees would assure members of the public and stakeholders that ethical standards were being upheld rigorously.
- 56 There is a strong commitment and a sustained focus on delivering and improving value for money. Overall, unit costs are consistent with other councils delivering similar levels and quality of services. Council tax is comparatively low and the latest MORI poll of residents shows that 37 per cent agree the Council provides value for money, a high rating. Services are of a high quality. The Council has challenging efficiency plans in place and a strong track record in delivering against budgets. The Council is on track to achieve its efficiency target of £21.4m in 2006/07.
- 57 Capacity of staff to deliver priorities is good. The Council does not have problems recruiting and retaining staff. Turnover and sickness levels are low but retirements are high reflecting the age profile of the current workforce. However, strategic workforce planning is not systematic at a corporate level, taking place only at a department level. The Council is aware of the need for a more corporate overview of workforce planning to ensure that it is able to recruit, retain and develop talented staff to meet future challenges. It has plans to put a programme of activity in place to address this issue.
- 58 The Council is meeting minimum requirements with regard to its approach to meeting race equality and disability legislation. It has published the required Race Equality and Disability Equality Schemes. It is currently Level 2 of the Local Government Equality Standard and is working towards Level 3. Progress on completing equality impact assessments has been slow and the methodology is seen as cumbersome and unwieldy. The Council risks missing its target date of March 2008 for achieving Level 3 unless the pace is quickened considerably.

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- 59** The Council does not have a sufficiently strategic and integrated approach to diversity and human rights and there is a need for more consistent corporate leadership on these issues. While the Council promotes and champions its commitment to these issues, and there are many excellent projects and initiatives, their impact overall on policy development, employment and service planning is limited. There are some targeted initiatives such as the Springboard development programme for women to develop skills, confidence and career opportunities. However, the workforce and political profile is not currently fully representative of the local area; women, people with disabilities and people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities are under-represented in senior roles within the Council. A more strategic approach to diversity would enable the Council to be more effective in addressing imbalances within its workforce but also enable it to develop greater leadership around community cohesion issues.
- 60** The capacity of some councillors to provide consistent leadership, challenge and support across the Council in the future requires further development. The Council has gone some way towards addressing the development needs of councillors through introducing a personal development review for councillors but the impact of this is not yet clear. There are some good initiatives such as regular briefings for councillors on hot topics before Council meetings. There is a good induction programme for new councillors and effective IT training and support. However, councillors need to be supported to take on a greater community leadership role and embrace new agendas if political leadership is to remain effective.
- 61** Project management is effective and projects are generally delivered on time and to budget. There are good arrangements in place for project appraisal, approval and monitoring and portfolio holders take a keen interest in key projects without getting too involved in the detail. This improves accountability.
- 62** The Council has an effective approach to procurement and is using procurement as a driver for efficiency. For example it has introduced electronic purchasing which is on target to deliver £250K in annual cashable savings by reducing transactional costs. The system has been rolled out, at no cost to suppliers, and is currently processing orders worth around £45m. The Council is also looking into joint procurement initiatives with partners but is awaiting the outcome of a detailed business case. The Council has historically provided many of the larger services in-house such as Highways Maintenance and has a large Direct Labour Organisation. It has carried out market testing and benchmarking analysis to ensure that its approach is competitive. It is working in partnership with other councils and partners to reduce costs and improve the design, procurement and quality of highway and other professional design services. The Council has a significant capital programme, including Building Schools for the Future, and has developed strong procurement practices to deliver the programme. It has strong partnerships with the private sector. The reconfiguration of Primary Care Trusts in the area has slowed the speed of development of joint commissioning. This is at an early stage of development, but the council has costed jointly commissioned initiatives and there is a clear plan in place. This greater focus on strategic procurement and commissioning means the Council can continue to improve efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery by reducing costs.

- 63 The Council uses IT effectively throughout its activities and partnerships and is rolling out a significant change management programme which will replace ageing infrastructure and enable integrated contact management systems and more streamlined operations. The Council has a good knowledge of internet use within the county and has worked with partners to improve broadband coverage in rural areas. The website is comprehensive and easy to use and received good industry ratings for its functionality. This means that local people have easy access to services and information via the internet.
- 64 The Council has a robust financial strategy and sufficient financial capacity to support the delivery of its priorities in the medium term. The Council was judged to be performing well overall in the 2006 use of resources assessment and performing strongly for financial standing. Based on the financial forecast the key elements to achieving a balanced budget over the medium term rely on a Council Tax increase of around 4 per cent and achieving £8m additional recurring savings each year. This will be challenging but the Council has plans in place to deliver the needed savings and a strong track record of successful delivery. Asset management is effective. The Council has detailed information on the condition of its properties and plans in place for disposal of surplus requirements. Capital planning is robust. The Council's capital strategy links projects firmly to priorities and where there are gaps in resources the Council plans to use prudential borrowing to provide its contribution. Through prudent financial management it has re-established sufficient reserves to meet future commitments and provide for contingencies. It has maintained its investment in priority areas such as adult social care and successfully bid for additional funding to support priorities. This means the Council is well placed to deliver its priorities.
- 65 The Council works effectively with a range of partnerships to build financial and staffing capacity to enable delivery of priorities. The Safer Derbyshire Partnership is a good example of combining and targeting resources to achieve outcomes for the community. For example the multi-agency initiative spearheaded by the police called Operation Relentless which aims to target the crimes which impact on quality of life such as violent crime, vehicle crime and domestic burglary. Additional police resources were supplemented by funding from the Safer Derbyshire Partnership resulting in some high profile arrests and the achievement of crime reduction targets. The area makes good use of the voluntary sector to increase capacity with a significant amount of children's provision such as preventative work commissioned from voluntary organisations. The voluntary sector is well engaged in strategic planning and is represented on the Children's Trust Board and partnership groups. This capacity is being further strengthened through the establishment of four posts located in the voluntary sector and funded by the Council to stimulate development and involvement of the sector. In addition robust commissioning arrangements have recently been developed to ensure equity of provision and that these resources target priorities. By working with partners the Council is able to achieve more than it could do alone.

Performance management

- 66 The Council is performing well in this area. Good performance management has enabled the Council to continually improve services year on year and ensure that its performance compares well with the best performing councils. There is a robust and consistent approach to performance management and the Council and its partners are using performance information well to drive continuous improvement in services. There are inconsistent arrangements in place for managing the performance of individuals which inhibits individual accountability and there is a focus on measuring inputs and outputs rather than outcomes. More effective evaluation of impact would help the Council and its partners to demonstrate progress towards improving quality of life for local people.
- 67 The Council has successfully used its performance management systems to ensure that services continue to improve. The most recent unaudited data for 2006/07 shows the Council has maintained its rate of improvement in performance indicators. Over the past three years 84 per cent of indicators have improved which is above the average for county councils. Over the past year 56 per cent have improved which is within the average range for county councils. Overall, 40 per cent of Derbyshire's PI's are in the top-performing 25 per cent compared to the county council average of 29 per cent.
- 68 The Council has a clear and rigorous approach to performance management. The performance management toolkit sets out a framework with a four phase approach of planning, implementing, monitoring and reviewing. Clear guidance is given and the frequency and detail of reporting is set out. The Council has been able to address underperformance. For example, constant monitoring of delivery of care packages has enabled the Council to stabilise performance which is now rated as 'very good' by regulators. The use of a consistent toolkit enables a rigorous approach to performance management and has helped Derbyshire to continuously improve services to local people.
- 69 The Council has a robust system to monitor performance which is used systematically to ensure the Council and its partners stay on track. The CORVU system is used to monitor progress against the LAA, Council Plan, Service Plans and Safer Derbyshire. There are plans to introduce the system into Children's Services and the monitoring of the CYPP. Reports are regularly generated but can also be accessed directly from the system. Partners can access live reports and input their own data. The Council has recently won an award for their use of the system in partnerships. Robust monitoring of performance helps the Council and its partners to ensure that priorities are being delivered.
- 70 The Council, its partners and local people have access to good information about performance. Regular performance reports are presented to Cabinet by the Chief Executive that include an overview of performance and detailed information of performance against the Council Plan, best value performance indicators (BVPIs) and PSA2 targets. Reports on how the Council is performing are also included in key publications such as Insight and the Gold Card magazine. This means that non-executive members, other stakeholders and local people understand how well the Council is performing and what it is doing about under-performance.

- 71 Councillors have not in the past been actively engaged with performance review. The Council has taken recent steps to ensure the level of involvement of councillors in performance review is consistent with their roles and responsibilities. For example, the Leader of the Council has introduced a new system of regular meetings with portfolio holders to discuss performance. This means that cabinet members are held to account for performance more rigorously.
- 72 The Council is addressing efficiencies and service improvement systematically and rigorously. It has an extensive Service Improvement Programme which identifies large-scale projects to enhance performance. The Council sets clear targets for improvement based on its priorities and to address underperformance. For example despite an increase in the numbers of children placed for adoption in 2006/07 this is still an area for improvement in 2007/08 and actions have been identified to improve performance such as new management arrangements.
- 73 The Council uses benchmarking and best practice effectively to drive improvements in services. For example it secured improvement in its support for young adults with complex needs as a result of learning from a Beacon council, and improved direct payments to adults and older people needing care by adopting Department of Health best practice guidelines. The Council is a member of the PWC benchmarking club and is using this to improve integrating finance and performance information which is inconsistent at present. This approach enables the Council to use good practice and the experiences of others to improve performance and drive value for money.
- 74 The Council's performance management system measures mostly outputs and inputs which, in common with many other councils, is less effective in demonstrating improved outcomes. There are some good examples of project evaluation but this approach is not consistent or shared across the organisation. For example, feedback is actively sought from the young mums attending the Clay Cross Bumps and Babies project and indicates that they find the project very supportive with useful sessions such as on healthy eating and sexual health. Outcomes for individuals have included increased self confidence, leading to one becoming a Special Constable while another has joined Neighbourhood Watch. However, there is generally a focus on inputs and outputs in the current performance management framework which inhibits accurate and timely measurement of outcomes. This means the Council cannot always assess the impact of its activities towards achieving its priorities.
- 75 There are some weaknesses in the way that individual staff are held to account for their performance. The Council does not have an agreed appraisal process for staff. Individual Development Reviews are undertaken that are a means of identifying individual development needs but these reviews are not linked back to performance against individual targets. The lack of a consistent appraisal system means the Council cannot consistently ensure managers and staff focus on performance and use performance management as an integral part of how they work.

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

- 76** The Council is responding well to complaints. There is a clear, three stage process in place. The Ombudsman's annual report for 2006/07 finds the councils complaints procedures are working well for local people.
- 77** There is no systematic approach to sharing learning. The Council makes good use of opportunities to learn from its own successes and failures as well as those of partners, other councils and the public and private sector. However, these are often informal and there are limited opportunities for cross departmental sharing of learning. A more systematic approach would maximise the benefits and have greater impact on service improvements.

What has been achieved?

- 78** The Council is performing well in this area. The Council has delivered high quality services for local people as shown by its CPA ratings. Council tax is low compared to other county councils and local people are very satisfied with the Council. Service quality has continued to improve and the Council and its partners have delivered well against challenging PSA1 targets.
- 79** The Audit Commission's annual audit and inspection letter for 2006 assessed the Council as 'improving well'. Priority services such as adult social care and children's services were performing strongly. The Council had made improvements in recycling and reducing waste and overall satisfaction with Council services had notably increased. The Council had made less progress in meeting some other priorities such as outcomes for looked after children.
- 80** The Council and its partners are effectively delivering improvements in priority areas and improving the quality of life for local people. The Council has a good understanding of the balance between local and national shared priorities and has demonstrated effective leadership in shaping plans and partnerships to achieve sustainable solutions for the area. Derbyshire achieved the necessary improvements in performance to secure reward grant of over £8m for meeting PSA1 stretch targets. There were improvements in the performance of schools and pupil attainment, improvements in elderly home care and reductions in hospital admissions and fewer people were killed or seriously injured on Derbyshire roads. Bus journeys were increased, and vehicle crime reduced and access to library services increased. There have been some early successes in the four partnership priorities set out in the 2006 - 2009 Sustainable Communities Strategy. These include a reduction in perceptions of anti-social behaviour, more young people taking part in sports in schools which will help reduce obesity in the longer term and more young people taking part in youth club activities.
- 81** Satisfaction with Council services is good. More than half of residents surveyed in the triennial Resident Satisfaction survey were satisfied with the Council overall. This is an increase on the previous survey and puts the Council among the best performing 25 per cent of councils nationally.
- 82** The Council has improved access to services in several ways. 'Call Derbyshire' is a single point of contact for all county council services which is well regarded by residents. The service is accessible in several community languages and by SMS text messaging for hearing impaired users. Access to council buildings is lower than comparable councils and there is scope for a more co-ordinated and strategic approach to seeking alternatives to building based provision. In 2005/06 only 51 per cent of council buildings were accessible to disabled people, which was below the median for county councils. There are some good schemes to provide access for disabled people to access the countryside, transport and recycling facilities. Providing easy access to services for local people helps to reduce social exclusion and improve quality of life.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 83 Derbyshire's main priority within this theme is to ensure a clean and attractive environment. In Derbyshire this means an environment that is sustainable, has greater economic prosperity, fair access to local services, facilities and housing and cleaner and greener public spaces. Targets within the LAA have been set around these themes and the Council is making good progress towards meeting its three year targets.
- 84 The Council is working well with partners and communities to create cleaner and safer places to live. Big Derbyshire Clean Up projects across all eight districts include litter picking, footpath clearing, rubbish removal, removing graffiti, planting, home security marking and lighting schemes. Feedback from residents is very positive. The Council is improving greenways and promoting access to the countryside. It has created new greenways which allow safe walking and cycling. These improve access and promote countryside activities which can also benefit local communities economically.
- 85 However, the Council has yet to develop a co-ordinated and strategic approach to influence the broader 'place-shaping' agenda across all areas of the county. Such an approach would bring partners together in a holistic way to influence sustainable development and community wellbeing, including the built and natural heritage of the area as well as factors such as planning policy, public art, public open spaces, community spaces and housing and health. Without a coordinated approach there is a risk currently that activity is unconnected and does not maximise resources or improvements in health, housing, jobs, crime, education and the environment.
- 86 The Council and its partners have been successful in addressing economic regeneration in Derbyshire. Approaches have varied from supporting farm diversification projects in rural areas, a successful campaign to maintain rural post offices ensuring access to postal services in the area, to providing solutions for derelict former coal mining sites. Following the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis in 2001 the Council put in place rural business support schemes using central government and European funding which have continued to support rural businesses. These schemes have helped farmers to diversify, brought redundant farm buildings into productive use and promoted local food and drink.
- 87 The Council's leadership has helped to secure the future of tourism in Derbyshire through the formation of 'Visit Peak District and Derbyshire' a new destination management organisation for the county and the Peak National Park. In 2006/07 £1.285 billion was spent by visitors to the Peak District and Derbyshire and the industry supports 24,000 full time equivalent jobs. This compares favourably with other top performing tourism areas such as Cumbria. Projects such as 'Visit Pride and Prejudice Country' capitalised on the release of the blockbuster movie and resulted in £2.5m of additional visitor spend. Promoting tourism supports the rural economy in Derbyshire which is becoming increasingly reliant upon the industry.

- 88 The Council is contributing positively to the local economy as a major employer and is targeting disadvantaged groups. For example it has an effective approach to recruiting hard to fill posts from disadvantaged areas and is working to reduce the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training through supported work placements. It provides paid placements for young people leaving care to enable them to access benefits and find accommodation. It also recruits young people on a 'route to work scheme'. Such schemes help disadvantaged local people to find work and reduce their dependence on benefits.
- 89 The Council works effectively with partners to address issues around strategic housing provision. It has set up a Sustainable Communities Board with membership from a variety of partners aiming to secure the provision of local affordable housing through the LAA. A protocol is being developed on maximising developer contributions through section 106. The Council has worked with the voluntary sector to secure the specific needs of service users such as vulnerable adults and care leavers. The legacy of coal mining has resulted in large quantities of empty and unfit properties and there have been various projects to secure the repair and refurbishment of these homes thereby increasing the supply of affordable homes in the area.
- 90 The Council is committed to addressing local and global issues around environmental sustainability. For example it is working with neighbouring councils to promote key messages through joint sponsorship of an Environment Bus. The recently agreed Carbon Management Programme aims to reduce energy costs and CO₂ emissions by 15 per cent by 2010. There have been some early outcomes such as reducing energy consumption in council buildings by installing cavity wall insulation and installing voltage regulation equipment at one site. These two measures alone are estimated to have saved more than 25 tonnes of CO₂.
- 91 The Council has shown strong leadership in bringing together partners to achieve sustainable waste management solutions which aim to reduce waste sent to landfill to zero well before the 2020 national target. This will require significant investment in new waste treatment plants in the north and south of the county. Recycling rates are improving across the county and performance is now above average. Derbyshire achieved its Defra recycling and composting target of 18 per cent a year early. However, the overall amount of waste collected has remained relatively static and 2005/06 figures show that Derbyshire is within the worst 25 per cent of areas nationally.
- 92 The Council has been extremely effective in delivering against the Local Transport Plan and was recognised as a Centre of Excellence for delivery in 2005. Improvements include a 22 per cent reduction in fatal and serious injuries in the last five years; improved satisfaction with road maintenance and buses; better traffic management in rural areas leading to reduced delays; child pedestrian casualties reduced by a quarter in deprived areas. These improvements mean that roads in Derbyshire are safer and the Council's potential liability under negligence claims is reduced.

- 93 The Council has been very effective in improving accessibility through public transport particularly for disadvantaged groups such as young people and older people. The Council's 'b_line' and Gold Card schemes provide free bus travel at off peak times, as well as discounts in a wide range of shops. Take up is very high as is satisfaction with the service. Access to public transport helps to reduce social isolation and improve access to local services and employment as well as reducing the environmental impact of car use.

Safer and stronger communities

- 94 Derbyshire's priorities within this theme are to reduce anti-social behaviour and engage young people in positive activities. It has set targets around achieving further reductions in crime and the fear of crime, reducing anti-social behaviour, reducing the harm caused by alcohol and drugs and creating safer and more cohesive communities.
- 95 The Council understands the impact of its services on the delivery of community safety priorities. The contribution to reducing crime and tackling fear of crime in priority neighbourhoods is incorporated into service plans across all areas of the Council. This means that community safety is seen as a mainstream activity rather than just the responsibility of the Safer Derbyshire Partnership (one of the four Boards that make up the LSP). The Council has a good understanding of community safety issues based on sound data and is delivering local priorities.
- 96 Collective partnership efforts have reduced crime. Overall crime has fallen by 12.4 per cent since 2003/04 with domestic burglary falling 36 per cent and vehicle crime falling by 30 per cent over the same period. Violent crime and criminal damage are increasing.
- 97 The Safer Derbyshire Partnership has developed a strong focus on building quality data and research through the police-led team based at County Hall. This has led to a focusing of resources on 'hot spots'. Consultation has informed the overarching priorities, for example, tackling anti-social behaviour is a high priority within the LAA as local people have said that they consider it the most important issue.
- 98 The Council and its partners have put in place measures aimed at addressing fear of crime and overall local people feel safer in their homes as a result. According to the British Crime Survey, perceptions of anti-social behaviour have reduced over the past three years and more people feel safe both during the day and after dark. For example, inter-generational work aimed at breaking down barriers between young and old has had a positive impact and articles in the Council newsletter help to reinforce the message that Derbyshire is a comparatively safe place to live. Operation Relentless, a multi-agency initiative to tackle crime that impacts on quality of life has secured high-profile convictions and helped to contribute to making Derbyshire a safer place.

- 99 The Council and its partners are using mixed neighbourhood policing teams effectively to tackle joint problems. For example, there has been an increased focus within the Partnership on community policing and a greater use of Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) and wardens to provide a more visible presence in the County. This contributes to helping people feel safer.
- 100 Community safety and reduction of anti-social behaviour is effectively promoted through the youth service's mobile outreach facilities, such as the Big Blue Bus. The Bus visits hot spots of anti-social behaviour identified by youth service and other agencies such as Community Safety Partnerships. Its visits provide local young people with positive activities to occupy their time and youth workers promote community pride. There has often been a marked decrease in reports of ASB where such diversionary activities have taken place.
- 101 The Council has undertaken some innovative work in helping local people understand what constitutes anti-social behaviour. The Council has published articles in its residents' newspaper on how to access services aimed at preventing or tackling anti-social behaviour ranging from fly-tipping and other environmental crimes to graffiti, vandalism and noisy neighbours. This means that local people understand what behaviour is not acceptable, and how to get help. This is a good example of joined up service delivery as many of the services described are not provided by the county council.
- 102 The Council is not yet providing a range of tailored services for victims and witnesses of crime. Support for victims and witnesses is mainly provided through the usual national frameworks although the Youth Offending Service offers tailored support for victims of youth crime. The Council has just agreed a one-year pilot to deliver tailored support for victims of Anti Social Behaviour to encourage better reporting and reassurance and discourage retribution.
- 103 The Council has worked effectively with partners to reduce accidents. Most notably, it has achieved a 30 per cent reduction in motorcycle accidents since targeting the most dangerous routes in the County. Locally targeted initiatives such as the Fire and Rescue service project at Staveley have succeeded in engaging with disaffected young people to prevent incidents of arson and criminal damage and have been successful with fewer reported incidents following the project. There have also been some additional outcomes in that many young people have gained a qualification as a result or become fire cadets. Engaging young people with positive activities helps to divert them away from trouble and improve their self esteem.
- 104 The Council participates effectively in the Drugs and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT). There is a single business plan which is shared across all partners for all areas of work. The plan has been based on a comprehensive needs assessment which included the findings of a Scrutiny Review of Alcohol Services. Consultations with stakeholders including service users and carers informed the priorities. User involvement in the DAAT is well developed for adults but the significant gap is with young people and adult alcohol service users which the DAAT aim to address in 2007/08. Performance against National Drug Strategy targets is generally good. Generally more people are accessing treatment plans and reducing their reliance on drugs and alcohol.

- 105 The Council is successfully providing targeted educational initiatives aimed at preventing drug and alcohol misuse among children and younger adults. Coupled with information, advice and enforcement activities carried out by Trading Standards there is evidence of a reduction in consumption of alcohol by children in years eight and ten over a ten-year period.
- 106 The Council has been less successful in its efforts with partners to reduce the incidence of alcohol related crime. For example; it has attempted to disrupt promotion of free drinks nights in Matlock by removing fly-posting and introducing safety wardens on Friday and Saturday nights in some town centres. These initiatives are relatively new and violent crime and alcohol related anti-social behaviour is thus still a problem.
- 107 Planning to support internal and external emergencies is effective. Emergency and business continuity plans are comprehensive and are regularly reviewed. They catalogue potential threats, provide comprehensive management strategies for internal and external emergencies, identify roles and responsibilities, states of alert and implementation practices. The plans were recently tested when severe flooding in the county took place over the summer of 2007 and found to be effective. Comprehensive planning aids rapid and effective deployment in response to emergencies.
- 108 The Council does not have a co-ordinated approach to developing community cohesion. There is no strategy in place but there are a range of activities which contribute to improving cohesion such as inter generational projects, diversionary activities to prevent young people from getting into trouble and joint community engagement initiatives. A recent paper to the Derbyshire Partnership Forum indicates there may be issues to address around cohesion and integration. For example in some areas of the county only 41 per cent of residents agreed that people from different backgrounds get on well together suggesting that tensions may well exist in some areas. A report was also presented to the same meeting highlighting the need for the Partnership to consider rural issues more strategically. Neither report identifies actions or indicates how the issues will be taken forward. Without detailed understanding and specific actions the Council cannot address these issues effectively.

Healthier communities

- 109 Derbyshire's main priority within this theme is to tackle obesity. This is because obesity is one of the most important preventable challenges to health in the area, second only to smoking. It is a significant risk factor for coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and some cancers. There are targets around reducing obesity levels in children under 11, increasing physical activity levels amongst adults and promoting healthy eating in schools.

- 110** There are some weaknesses in the overall strategic approach to achieving healthier communities in Derbyshire and some missed opportunities to capitalise on the assets of the area. These being those provided by the landscape of the Peak Park and networks of cycling and walking routes as well as less obvious assets such as gardening, nature conservation or heritage restoration projects. As one of the larger employers in the area, the Council could do more by actively encouraging staff to adopt healthier lifestyles. Whilst the Council's occupational health unit provides a range of health promotion and health surveillance services as well as general awareness-raising, there is scope for a more corporate approach. By addressing health issues more systematically, for example by combining programmes aimed at smoking cessation, with diet, nutrition and exercise, Derbyshire would be more effective in improving the lifestyles and overall health of local people.
- 111** The health of the Derbyshire population generally compares favourably to the national picture, although there are some pockets of inequality. Life expectancy generally reflects national figures, but is lower in Bolsover and Chesterfield. There is a similar position for mortality rates from Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), smoking and binge drinking. Targeted action such as the Bolsover Health project is being put in place to ensure inequalities are narrowed, thus demonstrating the Council is responding to the needs of its residents.
- 112** There are strong partnerships in place with the Primary Care Trust. There is a jointly funded Director of Public Health and the recent 'Health of Derbyshire' report provides good information which has been used to develop initiatives aimed at tackling obesity, smoking, teenage pregnancy, coronary heart disease and the gender gap in life expectancy. The data has been used to identify health inequalities and focus resources especially in deprived areas but this has not yet led to consistent improvements in outcomes.
- 113** There has been some progress towards meeting targets for reducing deaths from circulatory diseases and improving overall life expectancy. Life expectancy for both males and females is improving but still lags behind national averages. Adult smoking rates are also reducing and the Council and its partners are likely to meet the LAA target of reducing the percentage of the population who smoke to 21 per cent. The Council and its health partners work effectively to reduce delayed discharges from hospital and provide good intermediate care and assessment for vulnerable people. Health care for looked after children is of a high standard and all young people have good access to sexual health information and contraception. Innovative approaches are reducing the number of young people smoking.
- 114** The county is in line with national trends in teenage pregnancy rates, however in Chesterfield, Bolsover and Shirebrook there is an underlying increasing rate above national trends. The number of young problem drug users participating in treatment exceeded the 2005/06 target set by the Council, although the number of drug users in treatment per 1,000 population was lower than the Council's target.

- 115** Good partnerships and strategies are in place to promote active lifestyles and participation in sport for children and young people, and the Council clearly understands the links between being active and staying healthy. Its focus so far has been mainly on improving schools sports and it has done well to meet its targets for participation in school sports. It achieved its stretch target for 2006 and now more than 75 per cent of 5 to 16 year olds take part in at least two hours quality PE a week. The impact of this increase in physical activity levels will thus not be known for some time. A baseline analysis of obesity levels in children has been established but changes will only become apparent over time.
- 116** The Council effectively targets information and services to meet the needs of different communities. For example, it uses its publications such as 'b_line' and the Gold Card magazine to provide information and advice on health issues that are applicable to those audiences. It uses its mobile youth provision to provide fun sessions on healthy eating as well as practical advice on sexual health. Good links with doctors and other health professionals enable services to teenage mothers to be developed to meet their needs for parenting skills as well as sexual health advice. These various initiatives have been well received by users and there is evidence that they do have an impact. For example, the Bolsover Wellness Project has helped to reduce deaths from circulatory disease as people are encouraged to take better care of themselves. However, some initiatives have had a mixed success. Eighty per cent of schools have signed up for the Healthy Schools Initiative and 35 per cent have achieved the standard Promoting healthy lifestyles in schools is key to addressing Derbyshire's health problems.

Older people

- 117** The Council is working with partners to develop a more strategic approach to meeting the needs of older people. This goes beyond health and social care and covers other aspects of ageing such as housing, money, keeping fit and lifelong learning. It has a draft strategy which addresses the well-being agenda but action plans currently have a strong focus on social care. Leadership of older people's issues is evident and effective. There are Older People's Champions within the Executive and the senior management team. There are some good examples of activities taking place but currently these are not well co-ordinated at a strategic level. This means that corporate focus on what matters most is not assured and some opportunities to maximise the impact of activities may be missed.

- 118** The Council is very good at engaging with older people through a comprehensive network of 50+ Forums. This engagement has had a clear impact on service planning and delivery. For example the Swadlincote Forum raised funds to buy ten laptops; they are using them as part of an intergenerational project with schools where young people mentor the older people and help them develop IT skills. The Council has some arrangements for engaging with those older people whose voices are seldom heard, such as BME communities, those in institutions or with mental health issues. This means that older people feel that their views matter.
- 119** The Council actively supports inter-generational work as a way of increasing understanding and respect between generations. An 18-month programme of projects has been running in Derbyshire encompassing reading, gardening, digital photography, writing and drama. These projects have improved understanding and have informed the development of a recently launched a comprehensive and useful resource pack for teachers and communities to help them set up their own projects. Participants in the 'Two Generations' project in Doe Lea near Bolsover have worked together to improve a riverbank area. Since the project has started relationships have improved and there has been a significant reduction in the number of calls to police reporting anti-social behaviour.
- 120** The Council is working effectively to deliver quality services for older people. All 2005/06 performance indicators are in the best quartile. This means that more older people are receiving support to live independently at home, assessments and care packages are carried out within the standard waiting time and special equipment delivered promptly. In the past two financial years the Welfare Rights Service has helped Derbyshire residents claim an additional £8.2m. These services improve the quality of life for older people.
- 121** The Council and its partners have developed some innovative responses to the needs of older people. For example, it has agreed to establish a trusted trader scheme which will be web based and will enable residents (not just older people) to get in touch with traders who are committed to doing a good job for a fair price. The Derbyshire Gold Card, launched in April 2004, replaced the traditional 'bus pass' with a new, modern credit card-style image. It also offers shopping and other discounts at more than 1,300 outlets in the county - Derbyshire was the first scheme to link discounts to statutory/concessionary fares. Take up is excellent, at 89 per cent of eligible residents. Derbyshire has also helped to improve the safety of older people by, for example, distributing 'dusk to dawn' safety light bulbs which illuminate possible hazards such as steps or stairs. Libraries, including mobile libraries, were involved in electric blankets testing and home care staff have helped to reduce the number of falls by encouraging older people to swap dangerous slippers for a new good quality pair either free or at a reduced price. All these initiatives address important issues around personal safety, access to services and improving quality of life for older people, and have been delivered in partnership with, for example, the voluntary sector, Derbyshire Police, Derbyshire Fire and Rescue and district councils.

- 122 The Council is actively supporting lifelong and e-learning for older people. It has carried out training on ICT for 50+ forum members to improve communication and access to information. Up to ten members per forum have been trained and supported to use ICT. The Council has also installed two computer suites in two sheltered housing complexes - residents receive free basic ICT training. 75 per cent of residents at one site have got involved and sessions at the other are regularly oversubscribed. There are listening groups in four libraries around the county and reading groups for people with a visual impairment. Transport is provided for participants. The University for the Third Age (U3A) has been set up in Ashbourne, Long Eaton and Belper. This encourages older people to remain active and improves their quality of life.
- 123 The Council is improving service provision for vulnerable adults by providing extra care units. The first centre is opening shortly in Glossop, with two further units under development. They have replaced some residential homes and extended independent living and quality of life, and overall represent value for money for residents.

Children and young people

- 124 Outcomes for children and young people in Derbyshire are good. Healthy lifestyles are well promoted. Safeguarding of children and young people is good. Children and young people achieve well. Consultation with children and young people is good for most children. They are well supported to achieve good economic well-being.
- 125 Service management is good. Ambitions are challenging and realistic, based on good consultation. The comprehensive Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is based on a good and wide range of needs analysis.
- 126 Prioritisation is good. Clear and robust priorities are set out in the CYPP. These take account of most groups, but the strategic approach to diversity and human rights is not sufficiently strong to ensure actions are consistent and co-ordinated. Prioritisation of resources is good.
- 127 The overall capacity of the council and its partners is good. Political and managerial leadership is very effective. Recruitment and retention is good. Training and development opportunities for staff are very good but attendance is not consistently monitored. Partnership working is very good. Joint commissioning and joint workforce planning are at an early stage of development. There is good financial capacity to deliver priorities.
- 128 Performance management across children's services is good. The good corporate performance management framework enables managers and partner agencies to regularly track progress and identify areas of underperformance. However, the use of targets and linking of reviews of individual performance to priorities is not sufficiently explicit. Councillors and senior officers receive effective monthly summaries of headline performance. Scrutiny is effective.

- 129** The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Good multi-agency action plans promote healthy lifestyles well. However, the underlying trend in teenage pregnancies has continued to rise in some areas. There is very good participation by schools in the obesity strategy and Healthy Schools programme. Some good initiatives to reduce health inequalities are not sustained due to short-term funding. The health needs of looked after children and young people are very well met. Access to some health services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is variable.
- 130** Children and young people appear safe and arrangements to ensure this are good. The Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Board has wide representation and a well-developed business plan. A good range of preventative services includes targeted support for families where there is domestic violence. Children at risk of immediate harm are identified and responded to appropriately. However, the response to lower risk referrals is inconsistent. Child protection planning and practice is good. Safe recruitment procedures are not followed rigorously. Children and young people who are looked after are well supported and most live in stable family placements. Services and support for children and young people with learning disabilities and/or disabilities are adequate, with some good features.
- 131** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. Outcomes at the end of Foundation stage and at Key Stage 2 in mathematics and science are well above the national average. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have improved. However, in 2006 the proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*–C was lower than the statistical and national comparators. The achievement for looked after pupils is well below that of all other pupils, but that achievement gap is beginning to close. Inspection found that in most schools achievement for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was good. Schools causing concern are effectively challenged. Most pupils enjoy school.
- 132** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. A good range of programmes supports the emotional and social development of children and young people well. There is a good range of programmes in place for reducing anti-social behaviour and preventing substance misuse. The number of looked after children and young people participating in their reviews is excellent. The proportion of looked after young people involved in offending is high. Individual children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are consulted with well but there is no strategic approach to participation.

- 133** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to achieve economic well-being is good. A much more strategic overview of 14–19 provision is being developed and has created nine learning communities to address local needs. The overall percentage of young people not in education, employment and training has fallen; however, there remains significant variation across the area. The number of apprenticeships has increased and the provision for vocational courses is improving. The vast majority of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have transition plans. Care leavers are well supported and very high numbers are in education, employment and training.
- 134** The capacity of council services to improve is outstanding. The area has a very good track record of resolving intractable problems and sustaining improvement. The number of looked after children has reduced steadily due in part to increased investment in preventative support services. The annual performance assessment rates the council as very effective in improving educational achievement and enjoyment.

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 Derbyshire County Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 3 September 2007 to 14 September 2007.
- 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.