

Corporate Assessment Report

December 2007



# Corporate Assessment

**Warrington Borough 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 specific services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as relevant health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes especially concerning safeguarding, services for looked after children, and services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The separate JAR report also 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 and the most recently published Annual Performance Assessment from Ofsted which covers all of the Council's children services.

## Executive summary

- 5 Warrington Council is performing well. There are clear ambitions for the area which focus on improvements to the social, economic and physical environment, as well as addressing important issues of ensuring sustainability, reducing inequalities and building community responsibility. These ambitions build on Warrington's economic success but also address the key differences of inequality of opportunity and quality of life that exist between the inner and outer wards. The Council is building on the vision in the community strategy with the development of the new regeneration framework, which has challenging and highly ambitious aims for the future development of Warrington. This addresses physical and economic, as well as social, regeneration improvements that are important for the area. The Council's strategic plans and the community strategy have clear short and medium term ambitions but not all longer term ambitions are defined through clear targets.
- 6 Political and managerial leadership is strong. The Council's open and inclusive approach is effective in engaging staff and partners. Partnership arrangements are being strengthened and relations with partners at a strategic and operational level are good. The Executive Board demonstrates sound leadership and effective decision making, particularly when difficult decisions are needed. The Council is decisive in its action to achieve improvement and was proactive in its approach to reviewing the Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) arrangements.
- 7 There is good community leadership by the Council. Ambitions are based on an informed understanding of community need, which has been achieved through robust data analysis and effective consultation with local people. The ambitions address the issues that are important to local communities, particularly through the Council's approach and use of regeneration in Warrington. Effective liaison arrangements have been developed with the appropriate neighbouring authorities to address common issues. Relationships with external agencies are also strong.
- 8 There is a strong planning framework to ensure delivery of the vision through strategic, service and team plans, which includes risk assessment. However, there are some instances where the planning framework is not being applied consistently across the Council. There is an effective process for prioritising services.
- 9 The Council is providing good value for money. Council tax is low compared to similar councils despite a low level of grant from government. A robust approach was taken to addressing value for money by prioritising services using the Council's business intelligence model which assessed services against a range of factors including cost and performance. Significant savings are being achieved through the common business review process and by improved procurement of goods and services.

- 10 The Council has the capacity needed to deliver on its promises. Roles and responsibilities are clear and strong project management arrangements help the Council to stay focused on delivering its priorities. The performance management of partnerships is good. The Council has a robust performance management framework which is being used to improve services, including in priority areas. The Council performs well against a high proportion of performance indicators. There are, however, instances where the performance management framework is not being applied consistently and some ICT systems are under developed.
- 11 The Council is committed to building cohesive communities that celebrate diversity and has made this a key theme in the vision for Warrington. However, although improving rapidly, the Council's approach to diversity is underdeveloped. The Council is clearly focussing on improving outcomes for local people and has some significant achievements but the equality schemes have only recently been published. A neighbourhood strategy has been developed to tackle the inequalities faced by those in deprived wards however this has not yet been translated into action plans for those communities.
- 12 The Council is working hard to make Warrington a more sustainable borough and is achieving some significant improvements, which are recognised by residents and partners. The local economy is strong, which reflects both Warrington's strategic location within the North West and the outcomes of interventions by the Council and its partners. Planning policies are successfully delivering sustainable growth and a regionally-significant employment site is now being marketed, following substantial investment by the Council and its partners.
- 13 Green initiatives are gaining momentum; traffic congestion is reducing, and actions to raise awareness of the climate change agenda are being developed. However, progress on waste management is variable. Less household waste is being collected and recycling/composting rates are increasing, but Warrington remains amongst the worst performing councils.
- 14 The Council and its partners are successfully reducing most levels of crime. The Council has a strategy for improving community safety, which sets a clear vision of what the Council is aiming to achieve. Effective action is being taken to reduce crime and the fear of crime, and to improve community cohesion. Total crime in Warrington is at a level comparable with that found in similar crime and disorder reduction partnership areas but is reducing at a faster rate. The Council and its partners clearly understand the underlying causes of crime and tackle these as part of the approach to crime prevention.
- 15 There has not been a significant improvement in the health or lifestyles of the residents of the most deprived areas of Warrington. The Council and its partners are aware of the health issues for the area and have strategies in place to deliver improvements. Although the Council has undertaken initiatives to improve healthier lifestyles these have not generally been targeted at those most in need. Life expectancy is improving although it remains below the national average and the gap between the inner and outer wards is not reducing significantly.

- 16 There is active consultation and involvement with older people, for example through the older peoples' engagement group. The Council does not yet have a strategic approach to promoting independence and well being for older people that would help to set clear aims and co-ordinate the range of activities it delivers. Where activities do take place, take up is generally low. This is an important issue for Warrington considering the forecast substantial increase in the proportion of older people.
- 17 Outcomes for most children and young people in Warrington are good and improving. Performance in respect of enjoying and achieving is outstanding and those for staying safe are good. There is good continuity of provision and a focus on diversity and equality for children and young people.

## Areas for improvement

- 18 Since it received safer and stronger communities funding to pilot the Stronger Together in Warrington initiative in 2006/07, the Council has moved with significant pace and commitment to support diversity and tackle the inequality of opportunity that exists between the inner and outer wards in Warrington. The Council needs to ensure that its approach to diversity and tackling inequalities are embedded into mainstream planning supported by systems to capture and analyse data, secure resources, and, with robust actions plans to deliver improvements on key inequality issues such as health and employment in the inner wards.
- 19 The Council and its partners need a more focused and targeted approach to reducing health inequalities in the borough. The leisure service clearly recognises its role in improving health within Warrington and there have been significant improvements in leisure facilities. The Council cannot yet analyse patterns of use, demography of users and trends that is needed to ensure that the Council's investment makes an effective contribution to health improvement. If the Council and the PCT are to maximise their impact they must better target services towards those who most need them.
- 20 The Council and its partners need to develop an older people strategy that goes beyond health and social care. This needs to ensure that more older people participate in activities that keep them active in later life and engaged in local communities.
- 21 The Council's frameworks for service planning, tracking performance against key priorities and target setting mirror good practice. However, to achieve its full potential and that of its residents, the Council needs to ensure that these frameworks are applied consistently throughout the Council and in particular to areas of poorer performance such as waste management.
- 22 Although most systems are sound, some ICT systems are underdeveloped. In these areas the Council is not communicating messages and dealing with administrative and monitoring tasks as efficiently as it could. The Council needs to develop and implement a strategic plan to update its ICT systems for the future.

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

### \*\*Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

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

# Context

## The locality

- 23** The borough of Warrington is close to both Liverpool and Manchester. It shares boundaries with four metropolitan boroughs, St Helens, Salford, Wigan and Trafford, as well as Halton, Macclesfield and Vale Royal Councils. In addition to its urban centres over half of the borough area is agricultural land. The M6, M56 and M62 intersect in the borough and it is on both the main west coast and cross-Pennine rail routes. Two international airports are within easy reach and the town is also served by two main waterways; the River Mersey and Manchester Ship Canal.
- 24** The 2004 indices of multiple deprivation place 19 areas of Warrington within the 20 per cent most deprived areas nationally. Ten of these areas are within the 10 per cent most deprived. The majority of these areas sit within the inner wards of Warrington.
- 25** Warrington was designated a New Town in 1968. This enabled the borough to replace its traditional industries of brewing, tanning and wire production with a more diverse mix. This, and the borough's location at the centre of the region's transport network, has enabled Warrington to out-perform most of the region in terms of economic growth. The extended period of economic growth means that the proportion of residents aged 16 to 74 who are economically active, (68.9 per cent) is appreciably higher than the regional (63.9 per cent) and the national figure (66.5 per cent). Local unemployment rates are consistently below the regional and national averages, with the highest rates in the inner wards.
- 26** The borough's population is around 195,000 (2005 mid year estimate), 160,000 of whom live within the town of Warrington. The local population grew rapidly after New Town designation but is now comparatively stable. Warrington's population is mainly 'white British' in ethnic make up. The 2001 census showed that its non-white population (2.1 per cent) is significantly lower than both North West generally (5.6 per cent), and England and Wales (8.7 per cent).
- 27** The resident population is comparatively young at present but the number of older people is forecast to increase by 38 per cent between 2005 and 2021, and the number of children and young people to decrease by 14 per cent over the same period. Up to June 2006, fewer migrant workers registered in Warrington than in neighbouring areas. There is a growing Polish community, although this is smaller than both the England and the North West averages. There is a lower proportion of single household occupancy in Warrington (27.5 per cent) than in the region (30.9 per cent) or nationally (30 per cent).

- 28** Educational attainment in Warrington is well above both regional and national averages. Car ownership is comparatively high, as are deaths or serious injury from road accidents and congestion is a problem at peak times. Warrington is a low crime area compared with North West region but the fear of crime is slightly higher than the national average. The health of the local population is improving and the gaps between residents' health and the levels found in the rest of the country are closing. However, life expectancy in the borough's deprived wards is four years less than in the more affluent areas, and there are increasing levels of obesity and alcohol consumption.
- 29** Despite its record of economic growth, which continues to outstrip much of the country, the borough faces some significant issues. The inequalities in quality of life factors between its inner deprived wards and outer more affluent wards are marked, in terms of employment, health and educational attainment. Meeting the future needs of an ageing population also offers a challenge to public services in the borough.

### The Council

- 30** The Council adopted a new political structure in May 2002. This has a ten member Executive Board, and a separate overview and scrutiny function. After a long period of Labour control, the May 2006 local elections resulted in a shared administration of Liberal Democrats and Conservatives. Following the May 2007 elections the shared administration continued with Liberal Democrats (27 seats) and Conservatives (5 seats), with Labour holding 24 seats and 1 independent. The Executive Board consists of the leader, deputy leader and eight elected members. Councillors' responsibilities are aligned with the Council's internal structure and also cover the cross-cutting themes of value for money, innovation and change, neighbourhoods and communities, and safer and greener communities. Scrutiny is exercised through five scrutiny committees covering the Council's services and the cross-cutting theme of health. A Scrutiny Chairs' Forum oversees development of the scrutiny process.
- 31** The Council's internal structure was revised in 2005 to four directorates. These cover children's services, corporate services, community services and environment and regeneration. A strategic director heads each department, supported by heads of service. In addition there is a Chief Executives Unit. The Chief Executive joined the Council in December 2006. The Council has recently approved the introduction of a Governance Committee and an Officer Governance Group. The Council employs 8,500 people, excluding its arms length housing management organisation.

- 32** In 2006/07, excluding ring-fenced schools' funding, the Council's net revenue expenditure was £114.2 million - £0.4 million below the approved budget. A new approach to procurement and other increases in efficiency contributed to this position. The Council's 2007/08 net revenue budget is just over £118 million. It aims to maintain services at current levels whilst providing £0.6 million to deliver the Council's longer-term ambitions. The budget relies on £8.27 million savings from increased efficiencies and additional income. The Council has the second lowest council tax for single tier authorities in the North West region, despite receiving a comparatively low rate of government grant per head of population. £109.8 million was also spent on schools in 2006/07, funded through the dedicated schools grant and use of schools' reserves. The dedicated schools grant for 2007/08 is £111 million.
- 33** The Council's capital expenditure in 2006/07 was £46 million, an increase on previous years. The main areas of investment were improving the housing stock (£20.5 million) and transportation (£9.6 million). The Council is planning to spend some £116 million in its three year capital programme, 2007/08 to 2009/10.
- 34** The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), Warrington Partnership, is chaired by the deputy leader of the Council. It is structured around a core group, which co-ordinates the partnership's work to deliver the refreshed (2007) community strategy. There are four thematic groups covering topics such as health and wellbeing, transportation and community safety. Warrington has a strong voluntary sector, with over 1,000 voluntary organisations and more than 18,000 volunteers registered with them.

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

### Ambition

- 35 The Council is performing well in this area. There is a clear vision for the future of Warrington, which addresses the important issues for the area. The vision has drawn on good information and intelligence about the needs of its communities. The Council's political and managerial leadership is good which means that staff and partners are engaged with the vision and work effectively to achieve it. The clarity in short and medium term ambitions and targets is not reflected in all targets for the longer term. Community leadership is effective.
- 36 The Council and its partners have a challenging and realistic vision for the long-term development of Warrington. The vision, as set out in the community strategy, is that: *'over the next 10 to 15 years, Warrington will increasingly be a place where communities enjoy a sense of social, economic, physical and spiritual wellbeing; they are cohesive and welcome diversity.'* The vision is supported by cross-cutting themes to sustain success, build community responsibility and to close the gaps so that all communities in Warrington benefit from its success. The vision builds on Warrington's strength as an affluent area, with low unemployment, and continuing success in attracting economic investment. The cross-cutting themes, particularly 'Closing the Gaps', are important in helping the Council and its partners to tackle the inequalities that exist in the quality of life between the inner and outer wards, and tackling other issues such as the impact on services of an increase in the numbers of older people.
- 37 There are clear short, medium and long term ambitions for the borough. The short and medium term ambitions with targets are set out clearly in the community strategy, which also incorporates the Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets, and in other strategies, such as the children and young people's plan. These short and medium term ambitions are clearly linked to the delivery of Warrington's priorities - which are: *'children and young people', 'healthier communities and older people', 'safer and stronger communities and transport', 'enterprise and economic development'*. However, not all ambitions for the longer term are as precisely defined. Some are expressed as very specific targets but others are not. The LSP is currently developing its Sustainable Communities Strategy to address this issue. Whilst short and medium term progress is monitored, the absence of some long term targets makes it more difficult for the Council to fully plan action and track its progress against elements of the vision.

- 38 The Council has made good use of regeneration to support the long-term vision. The Council has a range of strategies and plans which have been developed over a number of years which support its use of regeneration to improve the quality of life for people, in line with the long-term vision. This includes making the town centre a place that people of all ages can share without fear of anti-social behaviour and the development of waterways crossing so that waterways unite rather than divide the borough. A regeneration framework and strategy with challenging and highly ambitious aims for the future development of Warrington is being developed and is intended to feed into the new Sustainable Community Strategy. The Council's work on developing its regeneration framework and strategy has also helped to co-ordinate initiatives, identify gaps and make the best use of resources.
- 39 The Council works well with partners to achieve shared ambitions. The Council and the PCT have agreed challenging ambitions to address the underlying health problems in the borough. A range of partners are engaged in delivering important strategies such as children's services and the alcohol harm-reduction strategy, through agreed action plans that sets out partners' responsibilities. This joined up approach enables the Council and its partners to focus their efforts on improving the things that matter in Warrington.
- 40 The Council engages well with citizens and with special interest groups. There are robust consultation and engagement arrangements. The citizens' panel is used for a range of engagement events including workshops and surveys, and the results and impact of consultation are fed back through a quarterly newsletter. Public consultation events, which included special interest groups such as older people and ethnic minority groups, informed the development of the corporate plan and also resulted in additional funding for green and community safety issues. A recent consultation event was hosted to better engage with the polish community. This open approach encourages contributions from, and involvement of, its citizens, and provides the Council with a better understanding of local need on which the shared ambitions are based.
- 41 Ambitions are based on sound information and intelligence about the borough and its needs, but intelligence relating to health issues is less well developed. Publications such as '*Warrington Towards Tomorrow*' and the '*State of the Borough*' provide a comprehensive statistical analysis of economic, social and environmental indicators that informs strategic planning decisions. Information is shared between partners at both a strategic and service level, although is further developed with some partners, such as the police and leisure, than with others, such as the PCT. On health, whilst high level data on the main health issues is being shared between the Council and the PCT, not enough is yet known about the local incidence of specific health inequalities that would help target services more effectively. This is being addressed, for instance through the joint strategic needs assessment five-step plan developed with the PCT which started in September 2007. Overall, the availability and use of intelligence and information has helped to focus activity and resources on addressing the issues that matter most to local people.

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- 42 Council staff have a good understanding of the ambitions for Warrington. This reflects the Council's effective approach to internal communications. For example the Council issues monthly staff news letters on a wide range of issues, as well as topic-based bulletins. Over 500 staff were involved in the visioning exercise that focused on the development of the longer term vision for Warrington. These arrangements raise staff awareness and understanding of the changes that are occurring and ensure the ownership needed to achieve success.
- 43 The Council is an effective community leader. It's political and managerial leadership have built strategic links with regional agencies and neighbouring councils. The leader has a high public profile through public events and communications such as the Councils 'The Wire' magazine and there is good engagement with the business sector at both strategic and operational levels. The Council's deputy leader is now chair of the LSP, and this helps support the Council's role in leadership of place. This approach ensures good partnership working and delivery of the Council's ambitions.

## Prioritisation

- 44 The Council is performing well in this area. There are clear and robust priorities within the ambitions set for Warrington. The Council is clear about what are priorities and what are not. It has developed an effective tool for the systematic assessment of service priorities. All services have been assessed as 'high', 'medium' or 'low' priority against a set of agreed criteria and funding is being allocated in accordance with the priority. This enables the Council to better target its resources to meet priorities. The Council's approach to diversity is underdeveloped but this has been prioritised and the Council is making significant improvements.
- 45 There are clear links between national priorities, the vision identified in the community strategy, and the priorities identified in the corporate plan. The Council has identified five outward facing priorities to support the delivery of the community strategy and its own corporate plan and a sixth priority aimed at improving the way the Council works. These are:
- *improving health and wellbeing and promoting independence;*
  - *making our communities safer, stronger and sustainable;*
  - *improving the local environment and economy and regenerating our deprived areas;*
  - *improving transport availability, infrastructure and choice;*
  - *ensuring all children and young people have the opportunity to reach their potential; and*
  - *transforming our organisation to deliver our outcomes.*

- 46 There are excellent arrangements to identify priorities at service level. The Council applies its business intelligence model to prioritise all services as high, medium or low priority. The model assesses services against a range of factors including the Council's objectives, performance, cost and value for money to determine a level of prioritisation. The results which cover all services are the subject to public consultation before priorities are set by the Council's Executive Board. This has enabled the Council to target more of its resources into those areas that are high priority.
- 47 The Council's arrangements to deliver the priorities through its strategic planning framework are robust. The activities set out in the community strategy link well with those in partnership theme plans and those in service and team plans. Responsibilities for delivering actions are clear. This is further strengthened by the links from the community strategy, into individual Heads of Service targets, and then through to service plans and team plans, which have clear time limits and milestones. This is a strong framework, but there are a limited number of strategic plans that do not comply fully with the framework in areas such as expressing all outcomes in terms of clear and challenging targets, or being fully completed. The overall approach enables the Council to plan and monitor its activities, to ensure these are focused on delivering the things that matter to the area.
- 48 Priorities are based on a good understanding of local need. The Warrington 'Towards Tomorrow' event used data and intelligence to inform discussions with local people to help inform the priorities for the area. The 'Which Way Warrington' event helped the Council to identify priorities through the consultation on the 2007/08 spending plans. This ensures that the vision and priorities adopted by the Council and its partners in their strategies and plans reflect the needs of the local communities.
- 49 The medium term financial strategy is robust. It has enabled the Council to successfully move money from non-priority areas into those that are priorities. The strategy covers the period 2007/08 to 2009/10, and makes adequate provision for achieving the Council's priorities. The budget setting process is linked to the business intelligence model's prioritisation of services, to allocate funding and to identify efficiencies. For example, savings from a review of administrative services were directed to help establish a Green initiative fund to promote quick-win environmental schemes such as tackling graffiti and mechanisation of street cleaning. This helped to improve performance on the Council's priority to improve the local environment.
- 50 The Council is willing to make difficult decisions to maintain the focus on achieving the Council's priorities. For example it is reducing over-capacity in secondary schools through a school re-organisation programme that will ensure funding is freed up and directed towards teaching. In addition, social care policy was reviewed to increase income to the Council and to ensure that clients make the appropriate contribution to the cost of care. Some of these decisions were made in the face of objections and the Council showed it was still able to progress to a decision despite this opposition. This has enabled the Council to stay focused on achieving its planned outcomes despite local opposition.

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- 51** The Council's approach to equality and diversity is underdeveloped but is now starting to progress well. The Council has developed its neighbourhood strategy to address the inequalities identified in deprived wards but this has not yet been translated in clear action plans to focus improvement activity in each community. The Council is at an early stage with equality impact assessments and remains at level 2 of the equalities standard. However, the Council has recognised the need to improve and is moving forward with significant pace. The Council has a track record of engaging well with its diverse communities and it is building its intelligence base about critical factors that affect them. For example, it collects and monitors quantitative and qualitative data, such as crime, educational attainment, house prices, claimant counts and satisfaction levels, to inform its approach to reducing inequalities in deprived neighbourhoods. There are already successes in the Council's current approach to diversity, such as new children's centres in deprived wards that have successfully supported parents into work. So, although the Council can point to some successes, its overall approach is still fragmented and it is not yet able to target all its services and resources effectively to reduce inequalities and fully support its diverse communities.

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

### Capacity

- 52 The Council is performing well in this area. Internal roles and responsibilities are clear, helping to make the Council accountable to the public and it works well with its main partners. The Council's transformation programme, which ensures delivery of the Council's key projects, is providing capacity to deliver improvements in priority areas. The competency of the Council's workforce is good and is being further strengthened by the leadership programme. Councillor capacity is good as are relationships between officers and members. The Council's arrangements to involve the voluntary and community sector in delivering its priorities are developing. Physical assets are managed well but progress has been slow on improving some ICT-based systems that underpin service delivery.
- 53 Roles and responsibilities within the Council are clear and the Council has the capacity to deliver its priorities. There are clear links between Executive members' portfolios and Council priorities. Officers are clear about their responsibilities and about the importance of consultation before making a decision. Management guidance issued in 2007 sets out the roles of strategic directors and there is an effective scheme of delegation. The Council's directorates work well together and the Council is good at using multi-disciplinary teams to resolve issues. The Council has adopted core values that describe the behaviour expected from members and officers. Relationships between members and officers are good. Strategic directors have a monthly one to one meeting with the Chief Executive where progress against planned activities and targets are discussed. There are also joint meetings between directors and portfolio holders to discuss progress against priorities. These measures support the broader accountability to the public and strengthen the Council's community leadership role.
- 54 Scrutiny is contributing positively to policy development and ensuring resources focus on priorities. For example, the gypsy and travellers' protocol resulted directly from a scrutiny review. Scrutiny also challenged the Council to engage further with the local youth parliament, which resulted in changes such as the youth parliament members' attendance at full Council meetings. The Council's scrutiny function is also working successfully with external organisations to focus resources on local priorities. For instance, it has encouraged the Police to adopt a more robust approach to recording traffic accident statistics, which will support the priority to improve road safety.

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- 55** The Council works effectively with its key partners. There is productive and sustainable working with clear accountability, with either pooled budgets or robust contractual arrangements with its key partners. There are also examples of the Council and partners working in a more collaborative and open way; on health issues, the Council and PCT have agreed that senior officers from the Council and the PCT participate in each others key meetings. Joint workforce development is not yet in place between the Councils and its partners which would further improving existing co-ordination. Imaginative and innovative Council leadership is helping partnerships in relation to children and young people and crime develop strongly, including a multi-agency partnership on crime, with joint appointments, police community support officers and neighbourhood action teams. These arrangements allow shared issues to be dealt with more effectively.
- 56** The approach to councillor training is sound. A good range of training is provided for Councillors, which is linked to local priorities and national developments. Training is mandatory for key areas such as dealing with planning applications. The Council is developing training by basing it on an informed assessment of individual development needs and introducing personal development plans for all councillors to further increase the capacity of councillors. As a result, councillors are having a positive impact on the capacity of the Council.
- 57** The Council has a forward-looking approach to the development of its workforce. It provides effective support to its staff to fulfil their roles. There are examples of notable practice, such as leadership development of the Council's top 100 managers, and the practical implementation of the learning from this programme into the Council's management of key projects. Eighty nine per cent of the Council's workforce has personal reviews and development plans. The Council recognises the benefit of having a workforce that reflects the profile of the local population but it has not yet achieved this. Although sickness absence is decreasing, it is still high compared with local authorities. The overall positive approach to workforce development helps the Council create a more flexible workforce and supports the growth of future senior managers from within the Council whilst adding capacity on key projects.
- 58** The approach to managing risk is sound. The strategic framework is good and the assessment of risk takes place at both a strategic and operational level. In the majority of service plans, the assessment of risk is effective with mitigating actions identified and responsibilities allocated. Key issues, such as job evaluation, feature on the risk registers and future risks identified in relation to job evaluation were reduced. However in a minority of service plans, the risk register is not consistent with the corporate requirement and a few risk assessments are incomplete. Despite some inconsistencies, the overall approach to risk management has helped the Council to address risks in a well managed way.

- 59 The Council's financial capacity to deliver its ambitions is good. It has a record of sound financial management and has been successful at attracting funding into Warrington from private enterprise. The Council also increases its financial capacity through its business processes, including the use of the business intelligence model to prioritise services. Significant savings are also being achieved through improved procurement of goods and services resulting in £1.4 million savings in 2006/07. As a result of this robust approach taken to addressing value for money the Council achieves good value for money
- 60 There is a strong approach to project management. The transformation programme, chaired by the Chief Executive, manages 15 key improvement projects. These projects are linked to the Council's priorities such as the project to deliver '*sustainable communities on a neighbourhood basis*' and the Omega project which aims to '*strengthen Warrington as an international business location.*' This transformation programme provides an excellent project management framework which is delivering improvements, such as £1 million savings from departmental budgets following a review of business processes. This approach also promotes shared learning across the Council; project teams include staff from across the Council and project sponsors from other directorates, based on skills and development needs. This enables the Council to manage key projects well and address issues that arise.
- 61 The Council manages its physical assets well. The 2007 asset management plan ensures that property management strategies and operational decisions are consistent with corporate priorities, support improved service delivery and improve asset utilisation. The plan also links with other key service delivery plans, which inform the Council's capital strategy and investment programmes. It is using school and partner assets imaginatively to deliver new neighbourhood centres for children and young people. This supports the achievement of the Council's ambitions and helps to maximise community and financial returns on its assets.
- 62 The Council is not maximising the opportunities of working with the voluntary and community sector (the 'third sector') to enhance its capacity. There are some strong arrangements in place for example through organisations such as the citizens' advice bureau. Although the Council is supporting the third sector through the allocation of grants this is not done in a strategic way by linking the grant to the delivery of the Council's priorities. The Council commissioned a comprehensive review in May 2007, which identified some strengths but also some significant areas for development. The Council is currently missing opportunities to make a greater impact in its priority areas by working more strategically with the third sector.

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

- 63 Although most ICT systems meet the requirements for good service provision, not all ICT systems fully support effective working. The Council is investing heavily in ICT development, and is making improvements. It has invested substantially in the new customer contact centre opened in September 2007. However, the intranet and some systems, such as those within children's social care and HR, remain underdeveloped. The Council has identified that it should invest to further strengthen its ICT arrangements, but it has not developed a strategy to do so as it is considering options to develop partnering arrangements. Most ICT systems are adequate however service improvement may be hampered in those areas that are not supported by appropriate ICT systems.

## Performance management

- 64 The Council is performing adequately in this area. The performance monitoring framework is sound but not applied consistently across the Council. Performance planning and reporting is comprehensive and is helping to drive service improvement in some areas but is not focussed in priority areas. Year end targets are set at a level to drive improvement; however, quarterly targets are not set in a robust way to help monitor and manage performance effectively. Performance management of partnerships is good but not sufficiently developed to manage progress against cross-cutting themes. Scrutiny's contribution to performance management is improving services. The Council welcomes external review, invites challenge and has recently improved its complaints handling arrangements.
- 65 Performance management is improving services in some but not in all priority areas. There is a strong culture of performance management that has been used to improve services such as the planning service, and in promoting more effective whole-service working within children's services. Thirty-six per cent of the Council's performance indicators for 2006/07 were amongst the best nationally compared with an average of 30 per cent for other similar authorities. This is particularly apparent in the Council's priority areas such as for children and young people where education performance is very high across all attainment indicators and in the priority to '*make communities safer*' where levels of crime are reducing quickly. In other priority areas such as health, performance management has not yet resulted in the appropriate targeting of resource to improve outcomes for diverse communities. Public satisfaction with many services, particularly those linked to priority areas such as improving transport availability, has also increased as a result. Whilst performance management has resulted in improvements in many areas that are important, performance in some, such as some aspects of health, has not sufficiently improved.

- 66 Not all targets are challenging or robust. The targets cover a good mix of national and local indicators and there is a strong target-setting framework, which demands a clear rationale for targets and comparative analysis. Most year end targets are set in accordance with the performance management framework and most services set targets to achieve the best level of performance nationally. This is realistic considering current levels of performance. There are a minority of targets that are not sufficiently challenging; for example where targets remain static for a three-year period. The framework promotes the setting of quarterly targets to help manage services particularly for those affected by trends such as seasonal changes; however, in most cases these quarterly targets have not been set in a robust way. The overall approach to target setting is overall driving service improvement but the management of performance is hindered in some instances by inaccurate profiling of quarterly targets and some targets that do not support improvement.
- 67 Officers and councillors work well together to improve performance. Reports on performance are timely, open and transparent, and link with the Council's business planning processes, which promotes a good understanding of how the Council is performing. The Executive Board receives regular performance briefings and actively challenges underperformance. There are quarterly corporate performance reports, outlining performance against Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) and corporate plan targets. Exception reports highlight any change in planned performance and appropriate action is agreed. There are also quarterly performance meetings between the chief executive and each strategic director and between portfolio holders and officers from the relevant directorates. The Council makes good use of comparators when reporting on performance, including benchmarking against national targets, past performance and the performance of others. An electronic performance monitoring system has been implemented throughout the Council. This enables the Council to identify where levels of performance are not progressing as planned and take early action to improve the position.
- 68 The performance management framework for partnerships is good but it does not fully align with the cross cutting nature of the community strategy, thereby making it difficult to assess progress in achieving some elements of the community strategy vision. The Council has strengthened its support of the performance management for partnerships. The LSP's thematic groups meet every two months to review performance. The framework was developed collaboratively with partners and includes a good range of performance measures with which to judge progress. Exception reports show where targets are at risk of not being met and identify the reason for any fall in performance and proposals for remedial action. The structure and availability of monitoring information is aligned to the community strategy priorities. However it is not sufficiently aligned to the cross cutting themes such as 'Closing the Gaps'. The approach to performance management ensures partners stay focused on delivering the ambitions and are able to identify problems at an early stage but this is not the case in some cross cutting areas.

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

- 69** The role of scrutiny panels in performance management is good and scrutiny work has helped to improve services. For example a working group considering customer contact issues supported a more co-ordinated approach to consultation, bus timetables were changed to provide easier access to hospital as a result of intervention by scrutiny, and Early Years services were improved following challenge from scrutiny including better contact with parents, and improved access to speech therapy. The Council recognises that councillors and the community at large should be more engaged in scrutiny work, and the Council plans to widen the scope of the scrutiny function to maximise its contribution. The reviews undertaken by scrutiny are helping to improve services and increase efficiency, whilst staying focused on outcomes for the public.
- 70** Budget monitoring is comprehensive and overspends are generally addressed effectively. The monthly and quarterly performance reports cover the performance position for each service together with an overview of major projects. Full integration of financial and performance data is at an early stage but the Council plans to improve this during 2007. This enables the Council to ensure its financial plans remain robust and continue to support the planned provision of services.
- 71** The Council promotes learning from its own experiences and actively explores opportunities to learn from the good practice of others. For example, the Council is a member of national and regional benchmarking groups. Inspection and performance review findings are generally used well to improve services, but in a minority of cases there have been some significant delays such as progressing some of the recommendations from the 2005 regeneration and cultural services inspections. The Council invites user feedback to inform service planning and delivery; however, service standards are not in place to give people a clear view about what level of service they should expect. Unfavourable comments on street cleanliness, particularly within the inner wards, prompted action such as the introduction of a green initiatives fund to improve performance. By learning from its own experience and those of others, the Council is able to develop and improved its services.
- 72** The Council uses complaints information effectively to develop services. The approach taken to complaints at service level is robust, with detailed analysis and reports to departmental management teams, which lead to changes in services. For example, following concerns expressed about the lack of integration between the Council and PCT, families are now better informed about the outcome of continuing care assessments. The Council has only very recently established a co-ordinated approach that aims to analyse the root cause of complaints to identify solutions that would include common messages across directorates. Complaints are being successfully resolved resulting in improved public satisfaction through the speed of handling complaints which has increased by a third since 2003 and performance is now amongst the best in the country.

## What has been achieved?

- 73** The Council is performing well in this area. The priorities adopted by the Council and its partners reflect both national and local priorities and some significant achievements have been made in these areas. Overall performance compares well with other councils. Plans are regularly updated to ensure they remain current. For example, the community strategy was refreshed in 2007 to reflect the changes brought about by the LAA. Local priorities are being underpinned by a robust performance management framework and resources are being directed to those priority areas most in need of improvement.
- 74** The Council has achieved some good improvements in the quality of life for local people. There is a good understanding of how a range of services contribute to improving the quality of life and the Council makes good use of appropriate skills and services to improve the impact it has. For example collaboration between public and private sector partners is transforming a 227 acre brown-field site at Chapelford into a new village involving the construction of more than 2000 homes and associated social infrastructure, including a health centre, primary school, shopping facilities and a public park. The village design is cycle and pedestrian friendly and free six month season tickets - financed through section 106 agreements, are provided as an incentive for new residents to travel by bus.
- 75** The Council is working hard to make Warrington a more sustainable borough and is achieving some significant results which are being recognised by residents and partners. The local economy is strong which is a reflection of Warrington's strategic location within the North West as well as the outcome of interventions by the Council and its partners.
- 76** Good progress is being made by the Council and its partners in delivering on the priority to make communities safer by successfully helping to reduce crime. Crime rates although similar to other crime and disorder reduction partnership areas, are reducing faster than others.
- 77** Further work is required if the Council and its partners are to achieve their aims to improve health and wellbeing, particularly if they are to successfully promote independence in the long term. Life expectancy is improving and the Council is on track to reach its 2010 government targets. However life expectancy remains below the national average and there have not been sufficient interventions to reduce the gap between inner and outer wards. Reducing the gap in life expectancy is a key target for the Council and its partners.
- 78** The Council's intervention and prevention agenda for older people is underdeveloped and the required strategic approach has not been progressed. This is particularly important considering the predicted age profile of the future population in Warrington.
- 79** The priority to ensure all children have the opportunity to reach their potential is also being delivered well. Outcomes for most children and young people are good and the educational attainment of Warrington's children and young people is amongst the best in the country.

## Sustainable communities and transport

- 80 The Council has a clear vision for creating sustainable communities. It places a high value on regeneration and is developing a regeneration strategy to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions necessary to support its longer-term vision for the borough. The Council has used its planning and regulatory functions effectively to support regeneration. For example, it has used compulsory purchase orders to assemble land needed to deliver significant improvements such as the £8 million redevelopment of the town centre bus interchange.
- 81 The Council is ambitious in its plans to improve the local economy. The Council's flagship regeneration project, OMEGA, is a site of regional and national strategic importance. It aims to provide 650,000 sq. m. of commercial development space and, in the phases already approved, some 12,000 jobs. It will involve over £1 billion of private sector investment over a 25-year development period. The site is now being marketed and commercial interest is high.
- 82 The Council is successfully tackling the high levels of worklessness that exist in some parts of the borough. There is an appreciation of the need to promote economic growth and employment initiatives in parallel. The Council has used initiatives such as job guarantee schemes to improve the employment prospects of its residents, particularly those from disadvantaged wards and disadvantaged groups. For example lone parents for whom it has discrete LAA targets. Job Centre Plus works in four of the Council's children's centres to support parents into work. The Council also targets incoming developers through the '*Maximising Opportunities*' initiative as a way of promoting training and recruitment opportunities. As a result during 2006/07, 160 economically inactive residents from deprived areas were assisted into employment against a target of 53.
- 83 The Council engages well with partners in supporting the local economy. For example, the Council is supporting growth in local business 'start ups', through the 'Warrington Start-up' fund, which has assisted the creation of 70 new businesses by unemployed people in deprived areas. Across the borough, the Council and its partners have been effective in stimulating employment opportunities. VAT net registrations in Warrington have increased year on year since 2002, a trend not matched by regional or national profiles.
- 84 The Council is working effectively with other public sector organisations and business partners to address the skill gaps and inflexibility within the working age population through '*Lifelong Learning in Warrington*'. Progress on raising skill levels is good, with annual targets met or exceeded. However, the Council acknowledges that ensuring that Warrington's residents have the right skills to meet the future needs of local and regional employers is an ongoing challenge. Significant progress has been made in establishing 14-19 learning, with effective partnership working across the Council, the third sector and the local Learning and Skills Council. This focus on future skills has ensured that relevant issues are considered early on development projects such as the skills working group on the OMEGA project.

- 85 The Council's housing strategy is improving outcomes. The standard of social housing is improving, targets for vulnerable people living in decent homes have been exceeded and initiatives to address homelessness are becoming more effective. However, homelessness is still a key challenge for the Council and its partners to overcome. The Council works effectively with registered social landlords to broaden the mix of tenure and increase the supply of private housing to residents. Planning processes have helped the Council to consistently exceed its affordable housing targets, though it is not satisfying the overall demand for affordable housing in the borough. Ninety five per cent of new homes in Warrington are built on brown-field sites against a target of 80 per cent.
- 86 The Council has improved accessibility and reduced congestion through a range of initiatives. Given there is a high level of car ownership in Warrington, reducing traffic congestion is a priority particularly along the key approaches to the town centre. Initiatives such as improved messaging for drivers on major routes, the introduction of decriminalised parking and the emphasis on public transport have all contributed to a reduction in congestion, as have initiatives with schools and employers. Peak morning congestion has reduced by 15 per cent and the use of public transport has increased significantly. However, the Council has not responded effectively to the public priority for better roads. Whilst there have been some improvements, public perception is that the roads are still in a poor condition. Improving the road conditions is now a priority for the Council.
- 87 The Council demonstrates a strong sense of environmental awareness and links this to its priorities. Some initiatives, such as the improvements to the street scene, are highly visible and are widely recognised by residents. The updated procurement strategy addresses sustainability and environmental issues. However, performance on waste minimisation is variable. Whilst the volume of waste collected has reduced, it is still amongst the highest in the country. Recycling levels improved marginally from 13.58 per cent in 2005/06 to 14.3 per cent in 2006/07 and are still poor but the performance on composting is strong. Overall, the Council exceeded its 2006/07 waste recycling/composting target – more than doubling its performance since 2003/04, which has helped to reduce the amount of landfill.
- 88 The Council is demonstrating leadership on sustainability issues and is developing a climate change strategy for Warrington. Activities include the procurement of energy from green sources for Council buildings, energy efficiency re-accreditation, investment in energy conservation schemes and the promotion of green travel plans. The Council's initial ambitions to reduce its carbon footprint are modest, such as a one per cent reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> during 2007/08. However, it is being proactive by raising the profile of climate change amongst individuals and local organisations such as through the climate change stakeholder event. The Council is also promoting energy efficiency within the home and providing information to residents and business on how they can help improve the sustainability of Warrington. This has raised awareness amongst the public and partners and has resulted in green issues being highlighted during public consultation events.

## Safer and stronger communities

- 89 Through the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP), the Council and its partners have an effective approach to crime reduction and crime prevention. The partnership is strong and well focused and where action is taken in partnership the results are good. For example the successful Prolific and Other Persistent Offenders scheme has resulted in a 70 per cent reduction in re-offending. Warrington's 65 jointly funded Police Community Safety Officers (PCSOs) work closely with the Council's Neighbourhood Action Teams (NATs) across the borough. There is an additional focus on the deprived wards through the LSP's Stronger Together initiative that aims to build stronger cohesive communities and reduce social and economic inequalities between the inner and outer wards. Crimes such as less serious wounding and domestic burglary have reduced in the inner wards.
- 90 Crime associated with the night time economy of the town centre is being tackled successfully. Initiatives such as setting standards of behaviour and dress for door supervisors and using CCTV to show door supervisors and offenders the impact of their actions has helped to turn around the trend in crime. The Council championed the introduction of a late night bus service as a way of encouraging the late night economy in parallel with promoting safety. Initial resistance from taxi drivers was addressed by effective negotiation and brokerage. Levels of crime in the town centre which were previously increasing have reduced by three per cent in the last twelve months.
- 91 The Council is also effectively addressing the fear of crime. The presence of PCSOs and NATs are helping to make people feel safer within their communities. Initiatives through '*Stronger Together in Warrington*', such as improving locks on windows and sheds in deprived areas and reducing overgrowth of trees and bushes on verges and in underpasses, are having an impact. There are effective arrangements to deal with bogus callers, with the Council's trading standards service using text messaging to alert residents about the presence of such people.
- 92 The Council has taken a comprehensive approach to addressing anti-social behaviour (ASB). The anti-social behaviour strategy, 2007-2010 was developed through the LSP and sets out clearly what is expected of partners to deliver the ambitions for a safer Warrington. The approach taken to reduce ASB involves community based activities, use of CCTV, police presence as well as environmental improvements to help reduce ASB in particular areas in the longer term. People can report anti-social behaviour out-of-hours, including nuisance from noise. This, and the Council's success in raising awareness in deprived communities about the assistance available, has increased requests for assistance by 35 per cent, but response times have been maintained.

- 93 The Council and its partners are improving community cohesion and reducing racial tensions. In a survey, 85 per cent of people said that people from different backgrounds get on well together and 83 per cent agreed that ethnic differences are respected in their local areas. The Council and its partners are empowering people to work together more effectively within communities by, for example, helping to establish residents' associations, supporting events within communities, and sharing knowledge and skills between community groups. The work in deprived communities, including an environmental improvement day, is helping people live together successfully within communities.
- 94 The Council has been proactive in addressing alcohol related problems and also in its leadership of the Drug Action Team (DAT). There are a high number of alcohol-related admissions to hospital and a high number of children presenting themselves at accident and emergency with alcohol-related problems. A range of interventions have been introduced under the '*Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy*'. For example a proactive approach has been undertaken to under-age alcohol consumption. The Council identified that some 55 per cent of off-licence outlets were selling alcohol to under-age young people. An action plan was developed and training courses were held, attended by over 300 off-licence staff. The Council has since carried out further test purchasing, which showed that 22 per cent of outlets were selling alcohol to under-age young people, close to the national rate of 21 per cent. In relation to drugs the DAT has demonstrated that it can deliver excellent treatment services; its 94 per cent client retention rate is the 6th highest in the country, out of 149.
- 95 The Council and its partners are making Warrington's roads safer. A scrutiny review has prompted the more systematic collection of information about road traffic accidents. The use of traffic cameras has reduced those killed or seriously injured by 21 per cent at targeted sites. There were 128 people killed or seriously injured on the roads in 2005/06; this reduced to 101 in 2006/07. This is close to the government target for the Council to reduce the numbers killed or seriously injured on roads by 40 per cent by 2010. Despite the introduction of safe travel plans for schools and specific work with children in the classroom, the numbers of children killed or seriously injured on the roads has not reduced, remaining at 24 for both 2004/05 and 2005/06.
- 96 Emergency planning arrangements are strong. The Council has played a significant part in the development of the borough's emergency plan. This is supported by the community risk register and emergency plans that detail the arrangements for mutual support between the Council and other agencies. The Council is promoting the concept of business continuity planning by encouraging the local business community to prepare for emergency situations. The emergency plan shown to be effective during a recent significant local fire.

## Healthier communities

- 97 There is a clear vision for improving health in Warrington. The community strategy aims to make Warrington a place where *'everyone can enjoy good health'*. The health improvement plan, which is supported by the PCT's public health report, identifies the key issues that need to be addressed such as the high mortality rates, addressing the health inequalities that exist in deprived wards and tackling increasing obesity and alcohol consumption. There are clear targets to address these issues in the community strategy, LAA and the supporting action plans. This helps the Council and its partners to stay focused on delivering change in these areas.
- 98 Although overall life expectancy is improving for both men and women, the Council and its partners have not been effective in reducing the health inequalities gaps in Warrington. The annual public health report for Warrington sets high level objectives to address some of the local health inequalities, in particular the gap between the most deprived wards and other parts of Warrington. All age, all cause mortality rates are reducing more quickly than in the rest of England due to improvements in diet and exercise levels over the last five years. However, reported levels of obesity and alcohol consumption have risen over the same period. Despite some positive trends, the gap in the death rate between inner and outer Warrington, which is 22 per cent, was the same in 2003/05 as it was in 2000/02.
- 99 The Council and its partners are improving how they work together to address the health inequalities in Warrington. The Council's Chief Executive is a member of the PCT Board and the PCT's Director of Public Health and Health Strategy sits on the Council's Management Board. This is also reflected in recent changes in the LSP, with *'Healthier Communities and Older People'* now one of the four thematic groups. This theme is also one of the priority areas of the LAA. The Council is a member of the *'Healthy Warrington'* initiative, which has been developed by statutory health and social care organisations, of which the Council is one. The chief executives of these statutory organisations meet to discuss how resources can be used to improve the overall health of the population of Warrington.
- 100 Initiatives to improve the health of Warrington's residents are having an impact but are not removing the significant health inequalities that exist between wards. The Council and its partners are aware of local health needs through a *'Health and Lifestyle'* survey undertaken in the borough in 2006, which enables trends to be measured. For some important measures of health, the gap between Warrington and the rest of England is narrowing. Teenage pregnancy rates have fallen and all young mothers have a named specialist Connexions personal adviser, who contacts them regularly and targets support to meet individual needs. Using multi-agency teams, four children's centres and extended schools are delivering services in the most disadvantaged communities. There are plans to relocate the Child Development Centre from hospital to Orford Park allowing citizens better access to services. However, in other important local issues such as obesity levels, alcohol consumption, and the gap between deprived and affluent communities, the gaps are not closing.

- 101** The Council and its partners have yet to make a significant impact on smoking amongst the local population. Smoking rates in some deprived areas are not falling. Test purchasing of sales of tobacco to under age young people was discontinued as unaffordable. A tobacco project worker has been appointed, using partnership funding, and a baseline indicator of the incidence of smoking will be developed. A joint project between the Council, the PCT and the Healthy Schools Team launched the Smoke Free Schools Award in January 2007 and smoking cessation groups are held in some secondary schools. The death rate from smoking in Warrington is higher than the national average but lower than the regional average.
- 102** The Council has undertaken several initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles but not all have been effective in addressing priorities. It introduced a free swim programme for under 16s, and attendance increased significantly compared to those when a charge was made, during the 2004 holiday period; up by 93 per cent in 2005 and 74 per cent in 2006. However, this initiative was not targeted at those from deprived communities or the BME community, and the uptake amongst these priority groups is unclear. The Council has formed an obesity team and has recently installed new gym equipment in its five leisure centres, which has contributed to a 30 per cent increase in membership. The Council has also provided access to more opportunities for exercise. For example walkers and cyclists have benefited from 10km of foot-ways and 15 km of cycle-ways, supported by the distribution soon of maps to all households in the borough which outline the routes. The lack of profiling information relating to users makes it difficult for the Council to ensure it is targeting those who need the services most and that they are having an impact where it is most needed.
- 103** Although the Council is encouraging employees to be healthier, its *'Making the Move'* initiative is not yet having a significant impact. Under this fitness initiative, for which the Council has extended funding, members of staff are encouraged to take exercise during working hours, by attending free exercise classes and events close to the workplaces. However, at 3.5 per cent of the workforce, attendances were very low compared with the 75 per cent target, which now appears to have been wholly unrealistic. This means that the Council cannot be confident that its investment in these initiatives is delivering value for money or achieved its objectives.

## Older people

- 104 The Council has not developed a strategic approach to older people that goes beyond health, social care. The *'Building the Voice of Older People: A Warrington Strategy for an Aging Population'* document contains good evidence of consultation and establishing links with older people together with a detailed action plan through to September 2007. This provides clarity of action in relation to consultation. However, the Council has not translated this into a clear plan of action to improve the way it supports older people and to co-ordinate the various initiatives that the Council and its partners are undertaking. There is no clear plan as to how the Council will take this strategy forward. This is an important issue for Warrington as there is a predicted 38 per cent rise in those people aged over 65 by 2021. In addition, the health of those already over 65 is worse in Warrington than the average for England. Without a co-ordinated strategic approach to the prevention and intervention agenda the Council cannot know if it is supporting older people effectively.
- 105 There is good engagement with older people. The Older People's Engagement Group (OPEG), which is supported by the Council, raises issues effectively with the Council, PCT and Police. For example, problems in relation to public transport and hospital appointment times, following hospital services reconfiguration, were raised and addressed. OPEG was involved in the Council's budget consultation and successfully lobbied for changes to the concessionary fares proposals. In addition there is an Older Persons Partnership Board, which has direct links to the LSP. This enables the concerns of older people to be heard and where possible resolved.
- 106 The Council has a good understanding of the ambitions and aspirations of older people. It has a good demographic profile of its population aged over 50, including geographical data. The *'Aging Population Consultation'* exercise in 2005 provided useful information from which to develop the older people's strategy framework.
- 107 The Council and its partners are providing a range of activities aimed at supporting older people to live long and healthy lives. However these initiatives do not engage significant numbers of older people and are not fully co-ordinated. There have been few activities that aim to bring the different generations together. There are some programmes led by schools but these tend to lack coordination and consistency, and are not targeted at specific areas of need. In addition, target outcomes, based on an overarching strategy, are not set.

- 108** Comparatively few people participate in the activities that the Council and its partners provide for those aged over 50. Although there are well established groups for social care clients in the older age group, the overall approach and activities offered for people aged over 50 are not sufficiently targeted or co-ordinated. The Council encourages use of the available leisure facilities. For example, the 'Leisure Gold-card' offers concessionary access to leisure facilities for the over-50s. Although some 500 cards have been issued, the Council is not yet able to identify the level of usage by different age groups or by people from different areas of the town. The Mature Movers events, which encouraged people aged over 50 to participate in activities to improve dexterity as they get older, has only 28 members. Similarly the 'Daisy Daisy' project, which provides elderly and disabled people with exercise through cycling, has a take up of around 27 people. The Council and its partners are supporting healthy eating initiatives, such as the community cafes and mobile shop, to encourage healthy diets for older people. The Council cannot ensure it is having an appropriate impact on the health and well being of those aged over 50 when participation levels are either low or unknown.
- 109** Although the Council supports initiatives to help secure the financial position of older people, it has yet to develop an approach to working with employers to promote employment opportunities of those aged over 50. For example, the Council has worked with partners to increase levels of benefit take up. The Council has also supported the development of Credit Unions which have helped those who have retired early through ill health.
- 110** The Council with its partners provide a care environment for older people that offers a high quality of life and extended opportunities. The Ryfield retirement village enables those with different care levels to remain together in high quality setting that promotes independence. People can access this facility from the age of 50. The Council also provides a comparative high level of 'housing with care'. These arrangements enable an easier transition from total to limited independence within a safe environment and offers improved opportunities of activities and interests.

## Children and young people

- 111** Outcomes for most children and young people in Warrington are good and improving. Performance in respect of enjoying and achieving is outstanding and those for staying safe are good. There is good continuity of provision and focus on diversity and equality.
- 112** The combined work of all agencies in securing the health of children and young people is good. Information for parents and carers is available and schools are very supportive of actions to promote healthy living. Health services for looked after children are also good. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services is making significant progress although further service developments are needed at tier 3 (for more severe, complex and persistent disorders). There are some exciting developments within the family support system with health professionals playing their full part in increasing the opportunities for health support and care.

- 113 Most children and young people appear safe and there is a good understanding across the borough of safeguarding requirements. The strong commitment to safeguarding is reflected in improved road safety measures, anti-bullying campaigns, good information for parents and carers and an effective Local Safeguarding Children Board. There is some variation in the quality of initial assessments in a few child protection cases. A new information system is being installed in January 2008. Cases on the child protection register are suitably allocated and practice appears safe.
- 114 Warrington has many outstanding schools enabling children and young people to enjoy and achieve well with excellent outcomes. The council is addressing issues such as surplus places in secondary schools, surplus balances and providing the necessary support to school governors and head teachers. Schools are active in the development of integrated provision in the borough with good examples of extended provision and joint working. There is a strong commitment to the inclusion of children and young people ensuring good support for the education of the most vulnerable including looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Exclusion rates are low with good support to children and young people who are unable to attend school.
- 115 Provision to enable children and young people to contribute to their communities is good. Effective work by the youth service, schools, voluntary sector partners and others helps build opportunities to make a positive contribution. The youth offending team provides good quality services to prevent offending and re-offending and is actively engaged in work with the police to target particular groups in greatest need. Considerable effort is being made to tackle difficult areas such as substance misuse, sexual health and teenage pregnancy and progress in these areas is good.
- 116 Provision for young people to achieve economic well-being is good and there has been sustained progress in ensuring that young people are in education, employment or training. This is supported by good partnership working between the Council, the Learning and Skills Council, the Connexions service, employers and training providers. The take-up of work based learning post-16, particularly by females across the authority is comparatively low. In 2006, only 1 per cent of Year 11 leavers chose Work Based Learning options, a decrease of 1.1 percentage points on the previous year. The percentage of work based learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 2006 was also low.

- 117 The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) provides a clear sense of direction. The plan is fully backed by councillors and all partner agencies. Children's services are afforded high priority. The CYPP review provides an accurate and realistic appraisal of progress to date. Priorities are clear and being implemented well by the council and its partners, although some targets and standards are not clarified. Planning in respect of equality and diversity has been comparatively slow but there is now strong and effective leadership to take this forward in more consistent ways. The strategic director of children's services and her management team provide strong, open leadership as they successfully build integrated services. Senior management capacity has been increased with the addition of a new post to strengthen performance management issues and stimulate further challenge. There is an increasing focus on engaging young people in the design and delivery of services. Capacity is good and improvement prospects are excellent.

## 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 Warrington Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 3 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.