

# **Comprehensive Performance Assessment**

**Hyndburn 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 and Improvement

## Executive summary

- 3 The Council's previous performance was judged as 'fair'. The Council is now performing strongly. Over the past three years councillors from all parties and staff within the Council have worked relentlessly to address previous financial weaknesses and still deliver their own and partners' ambitions.
- 4 The Council's challenging but achievable agenda is based on good consultation and analysis. It demonstrates a firm resolve to close the gap between local and national economic and social indicators, improve the quality of life for local people and raise their aspirations. It is working hard to achieve this through neighbourhood management, improved job opportunities, housing, regeneration, community safety and cohesion and cultural facilities. There is strong approval from a wide range of stakeholders of the work that the Council is doing.
- 5 The long term vision for regenerating the borough has enabled the Council and its partners to sustain their ambition over a number of years. The recently reformed LSP provides a clear partnership focus which is successfully tackling areas of greatest need and potential. Lead councillors and officers provide impressive, visible and effective community leadership.
- 6 The Council's priorities are based on a well-developed understanding of local needs and are the basis for the focus of the Council's actions. This focus has in turn resulted in increased investment in priority areas.
- 7 The Leader and Managing Director demonstrate effective political and managerial leadership and are highly respected by partners. The Council understands the interdependency between neighbouring councils and has influenced wider regeneration agenda in Pennine Lancashire in pursuit of its ambitious plans to gain maximum benefit for the borough.
- 8 The Council has evolved over the past three years and a significant change in culture and working practices has resulted in a modern business operation where councillors and officers work well together. The Council has built up sufficient financial reserves from a negative base through sound financial management. Innovative partnering and procurement is ensuring that it can sustain its capacity over time. There are clear arrangements in place to assess and review service performance. Staff are clear about their responsibilities and morale is good. This has resulted, for example, in a marked reduction in sickness absence and improved performance in key service areas. The Council is self aware and is proactive in learning effectively from others.

- 9 The Council is making good progress in achieving its ambitions for the borough, narrowing the gap between local performance and national averages in key areas. Performance indicators show that overall there is a track record of improvement although there are still some areas of weak performance. Physical and economic regeneration is evident across the borough resulting in improvements to the most deprived areas and town centres. Housing, business, training, job opportunities and leisure opportunities are also improving. Neighbourhood renewal activity is resulting in positive outcomes, with successes in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and stronger communities. The Council is also making valuable contributions to the community priorities of health and life-long learning. However by the nature of the challenge, it will take time before some activities will result in demonstrable outcomes.

## Areas for improvement

- 10 The priorities within some aims in the corporate strategy are not clearly articulated. This creates a risk of misinterpretation and a lack of alignment of actions within service plans. The Council should identify the elements within each overarching priority that will be the focus for shorter-term service planning.
- 11 There is a risk that decisions taken to address under performance may not take account of the financial implications. The Council should strengthen its performance management arrangements to integrate financial, project and performance management.
- 12 The Council has undertaken some of the work required to make sure its services are inclusive but a lack of a strategic approach to equalities and diversity has meant that it has failed to reach Level 2 of the equalities standard by its targeted date. This creates a risk that the needs of the borough's diverse community are not being met in a co-ordinated way. The Council should build on its progress to date to ensure that a consistent approach is taken across all services.

## Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*	Weighted score
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	4	8
	Prioritisation	3	6
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2	4
	Performance management	3	6
What has been achieved?	Achievement and Improvement	3	21
<b>weighted score</b>		<b>45</b>	
<b>CPA category</b>		<b>Excellent</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>			

### \*\*Banding thresholds for determining CPA category

Category	Required score
Excellent	45-60
Good	36-44
Fair	28-35
Weak	21-27
Poor	20 or less

## Context

### The locality

- 13 Hyndburn is the smallest district in Lancashire covering 73 square kilometres between the Pennine Lancashire towns of Burnley and Blackburn. It has a slowly rising population of 82,000, including an ethnic minority community of 9.3 per cent. The borough is a mix of urban and rural areas with larger towns such as Accrington and Great Harwood and more isolated rural settlements such as Altham and Knuzden. Transport links are good, with motorway access and rail links across the Central Lancashire City Region and Greater Manchester.
- 14 The local economy was originally built around the traditional textile manufacturing industry which has declined dramatically since the early 1990s. Most employment within the borough is now concentrated within the manufacturing sector, which currently employs 23 per cent of the work force, retailing and business services sectors. As at September 2007, the unadjusted unemployment claimant count total in Hyndburn was 1.9 per cent of the working population compared to 2.2 per cent nationally.
- 15 Levels of deprivation are continuing to fall. In 2004, Hyndburn was ranked as the 58th most deprived district out of the 354 nationally compared to 45th in 2000. There is a growing number of affluent areas with high disposable income. However areas remain where residents suffer from multiple deprivation and inequality in several aspects of their lives. One in six of Hyndburn's 53 localities are in the 10 per cent most deprived. These localities are characterised by poor housing, high unemployment, worklessness, low expectations linked to low levels of attainment and skills, and poor health. Life expectancy for both men and women is below national averages but improving. There have been significant reductions in mortality rates from circulatory diseases, closing the gap on national averages and improving to below the regional average for the first time. Overall crime is higher than average. Since 2004 overall crime has reduced by 27 per cent. The racial tensions and disturbances experienced in adjoining boroughs in the early 2000's did not manifest in any of Hyndburn's areas. Three quarters of homes in the borough are owner occupied and 14 per cent are social rented.

### The Council

- 16 The Council has had a Conservative administration since May 2003. Political control is closely contested with 18 Conservative councillors, 14 Labour and three independents. A cabinet-style executive governs the business of the Council with six portfolios which are aligned to the community and corporate priorities. The overview and scrutiny committee is supplemented by two sub committees covering performance and policy. One parish council and nine area councils operate at a local level. Each area council has a share of £250,000 capital and £10,000 revenue budget to allocate to local projects.

- 17 The Council's net revenue budget for 2007/08 is estimated to be £14.65 million, the greatest share going to Community Services (£9.2 million) and a capital programme of £10.8 million, funded largely through the Housing Market Renewal programme (£6.7 million). The Council employs 393 staff. The Council's management team comprises of a Managing Director, Deputy Managing Director, Director of Finance and Head of Legal and Democratic Services.
- 18 The corporate assessment in 2004 assessed the Council as 'Fair' with weaknesses in financial management and control which may have had an impact on the Council's capacity to remain focused and deliver service improvements. The Council closed the 2003 financial year with negative reserves of £111,000 and a requirement to reduce service budgets by 15 per cent. The Council currently has financial reserves of £1.5 million.
- 19 The Council transferred its housing stock to Hyndburn Homes in April 2006. This has enabled a substantial programme of repairs and improvements to tenants' homes, with £35 million to be invested over the next seven years.
- 20 The local strategic partnership (LSP) Hyndburn First Limited was formed in 2001 primarily to administer neighbourhood renewal funding (NRF). It had limited company status with a board comprising of stakeholders and representatives from partner organisations. Following delivery of the first three years of the community strategy, partners recognised the need to restructure the LSP to maximise its effectiveness. In March 2006, the LSP invited the Government Office North West (GONW) to assist in a review and restructuring of the partnership to ensure that it would be fit for purpose in the future. The new LSP, the Hyndburn Partnership, was formed in April 2007. At the time of the assessment the remaining vacant posts on the new board, were being filled and the sustainable communities strategy was being drafted.

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

### Ambition

- 21 The Council is performing strongly in this area. The Council demonstrates a firm resolve to close the gap between local and national economic and social indicators which will improve local people's quality of life. Its challenging but achievable agenda is based on good consultation and analysis. There is a long-term vision for regenerating the borough and the Council and its partners have sustained their ambition over a number of years. Through innovative partnerships this has resulted in a range of improvements and developments which have increased the vibrancy and safety of the area, increased the number of shoppers and visitors to the borough and attracted additional investment from new and existing businesses and health and educational institutions. Through effective community leadership, the Council has empowered local communities to become more inclusive and cohesive.
- 22 The Council and its partners share well-understood and challenging ambitions to regenerate the borough and improve the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of the area. Ambitions are clearly set out in the LSP's community strategy for 2003 to 2008. They centre on making Hyndburn a place where people will choose to live, work and visit; live in thriving communities; have greater choice about where they live, learn and work; thrive in a healthy safe and cared for environment; realise their potential through learning and development; and where businesses choose to set up and grow. The strategy includes a range of targets and milestones for the agreed aims and objectives. Examples include, reducing the number of unfit homes by 14 per cent by 2008, developing 75 per cent of new housing on brownfield land by 2008 and supporting the reduction of cancer deaths by 40 per cent by 2010. In addition, the strategy sets out a range of quality of life indicators. This means that the Council has a clear baseline against which success can be measured.

- 23 The Council and its partners have made clear their longer term place shaping agenda through the development of the draft sustainable community strategy 2008 to 2018. The vision is to make Hyndburn 'The place to be'. There is a clear commitment 'to increase the life chances for all people in the Borough and to make Hyndburn more attractive for those choosing to live and invest in it'. Three principles underpin the ten-year vision. They relate to choice, sustainable growth and narrowing the gap across the borough and to reduce disparities between Hyndburn and the rest of the country. The focus is to deliver this ambition in partnership through a number of transformational projects which will benefit the whole borough, and a number of complementary interventions which target specific neighbourhoods and vulnerable groups including BME communities. The LSP has identified three early interventions which will make the most difference. As a result, short-term projects are now in place to reduce the number of people not in employment, training or education, implement secure gating in vulnerable areas, and to tackle alcohol abuse. This will ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place before the existing community strategy targets and timescales expire.
- 24 The Council provides strong and effective strategic leadership. There is a clear resolve to raise the aspirations of all local people, close the gap between the most and least deprived communities and to improve their quality of life. It champions the regeneration of the borough effectively. The Leader and Managing Director are recognised by partners to be accessible, and persuasive but not over dominating in their approach to achieve this. There is strong approval from a wide range of stakeholders, including many from the private sector, of the work that the Council is doing. The Council also plays an active role outside its own boundaries. Examples include regeneration activity with Blackburn with Darwen Council and the Elevate Housing Market Renewal Initiative across the East Lancashire authorities (Pennine Lancashire). Partners recognise the Council's contribution to the understanding of economic factors and the scale and nature of the cross tenure housing problems in the sub-region. This has also led to the Pennine Lancashire image becoming more prominent in the north of England.
- 25 The Council has played a key role in the LSP since it was formed in 2001. The partnership has a broad range of membership including representatives from the voluntary sector. The Council has worked closely with its partners to ensure that roles are clearly understood and has taken a positive lead role in the review and formation of the new LSP. The Managing Director has successfully encouraged pre-existing and new partners in the restructured board to continue to work effectively, bringing in the Lancashire local area agreement (LAA) strands and developing the draft sustainable community strategy.
- 26 The Council's strategic and operational plans support the community strategy and the LAA through its own priorities. This has resulted in significant regeneration of the town centres and the most deprived neighbourhoods, improved parks and open spaces, reduced crime and fear of crime and empowered communities.

- 27** The Council also makes significant contributions to the health and social care and education and lifelong learning themes of the community strategy which are led by other partners. Examples include its involvement in Sure Start initiatives, two new LIFT Schemes, its persistent and successful lobbying of the County Council to bring sixth form education back into the borough and the securing of a Dental Education Centre where students from Central Lancashire and Liverpool will continue to develop their skills and begin to treat patients. This demonstrates that the Council is making clear links between its priority to regenerate the borough and the contribution of its partners.
- 28** The Council's challenging ambitions are underpinned by plans and strategies and informed by good baseline information. The Hyndburn profile is used to collate and update local information on an annual basis.. Information is based on quantitative sources such as a local shared information system and qualitative information on responses to consultation exercises. The needs and views of hard to reach groups are captured through effective community engagement which includes outreach sessions.
- 29** Effective community engagement mechanisms are shaping the Council's services. It uses a comprehensive consultation strategy and a toolkit based on best practice elsewhere. This helps the Council to focus on the most effective ways to engage with specific groups. Area councils are another way in which people can influence service design and delivery in a practical and user friendly way. Meetings are well attended by the public and are seen as a positive way of getting things done. The Council also works effectively with other community groups to empower and enable them to take action to improve their own quality of life. This is a key element of its neighbourhood management process which works to narrow the gap between the least and most deprived wards. A good example is the Neat Streets programme which is a multi agency initiative that targets 'crime and grime hot spots'. This is having a major impact in the most deprived areas resulting in a cleaner and safer environment.
- 30** The Council has developed effective mechanisms for researching and engaging with minority ethnic and other hard to reach groups. The corporate research working group includes members from across the Council and ensures research and consultation is carried out in a co-ordinated way. It also makes use of a local intelligence system developed through housing market renewal. In addition to consultation related to major regeneration projects such as the Accrington Town Centre Masterplan, the group has engaged with Parasol, a local support network for Eastern European migrants, to develop its understanding of the needs of this growing sector of the local community.

## 14 Comprehensive Performance Assessment | What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 31 The Council's internal and external communications are well developed. It uses its new civic newspaper *The Beacon* and local press releases to keep local people informed of its activities and to gain feedback. Internally, there are regular staff, manager and councillor briefings and newsletters which are easy to read and well produced. Briefings contain good background notes to help team leaders convey messages effectively. There are also other channels available for staff to air their views and access the Managing Director through the intranet. These channels are valued by staff. A recent staff survey held in September 2007 showed that 83 per cent of respondents were aware of what the Council was trying to achieve with 91 per cent of staff understanding their roles and responsibilities.

### Prioritisation

- 32 The Council is performing well in this area. It has clear, high level priorities which reflect the needs of the community and demonstrate the Council's understanding of the scale of the challenges and the opportunities faced. These priorities, which are shared with partners, fit well with sub-regional, regional and national priorities and enable the Council to stay focused on what needs to be done and to allocate resources appropriately.
- 33 The Council is clear about its priorities. It has a structured approach to developing these and ensuring they are based on local concerns. The Council takes its lead from the community strategy. The current priorities comprise of those aspects of the LSPs and the Council's vision that it can contribute most to. These are: community safety; housing and the environment; economy and employment; culture and leisure and corporate governance and community leadership. Within these priorities the Council is clear about how it can maximise its impact in the short to medium-term. This has led to a sustained focus on a number of key issues. These include:
- the continued support of the LSP and its restructure to ensure it is fit for purpose to address future challenges;
  - a focus on building its capacity and delivering regeneration activity which has led to improved town centres and employment growth;
  - a strong determination to deliver the first two phases of the Elevate Housing Market Renewal programme which involved significant challenges, leadership and difficult decisions;
  - a significant drive to reduce crime and improve the environment of the most deprived areas; and
  - targeted contributions to the LSP's priorities of life long learning and health and social care.
- 34 The focus on priority areas has been sustained despite significant organisational change projects such as the transfer of the Council's housing stock and its highways maintenance and leisure services to other providers. There is broad political consensus on the main issues and priorities for the area and good cross party working has resulted in long-term actions and targets staying on course.

- 35** Priorities are based on a thorough analysis of the Council's local context and a range of consultation with local people and stakeholders. This ensures that the Council has realistic priorities in place that are grounded in local research, clearly set out and understood.
- 36** The Council's strategies and working practices ensure that all communities of interest are considered and there is an evident culture of inclusivity across the organisation. It has actively sought to engage with its diverse local communities in relation to priorities and to inform decision making. Examples include working with:
- the East Lancashire Physical Disabilities Partnership Board to tailor housing developments;
  - neighbourhood ambassadors in neighbourhood management areas; and
  - gypsies and travellers to ascertain accommodation needs, with results being used to inform the emerging Local Development Framework core strategy and other development plans and housing strategies.
- 37** The corporate performance plan and service plans are action focused. They set out clearly how the Council links its activity to the LAA and community plan and are used to inform the service planning process. They identify the links to partners' responsibilities, key actions for delivering them, and challenging targets with identified outcomes in most areas. Strong managerial leadership and effective communication have ensured that priorities are clearly understood at all levels of the Council and by its partners. However the priorities within some aims are not clearly articulated in the corporate strategy. For example the 2007/08 update to the corporate and performance plan for 2004 to 2008 re-affirms the priority given to the issues of corporate governance and community leadership, but is not clear on which elements of this overarching priority should provide the focus for shorter-term service planning. This creates a risk of misinterpretation and a lack of alignment of actions within service plans.
- 38** Joint strategies in areas such as regeneration, community safety and waste management are developed with stakeholders and widely shared among partners. The revised housing strategy, which will include a Lancashire Pennine sub-strategy is being developed in conjunction with the other Lancashire councils. Subsidiary strategies on homelessness and private sector renewal will be developed once this is complete. Together, these mechanisms provide a good basis to monitor partnership activity effectively, and to measure outcomes and progress against priorities.
- 39** Service planning arrangements are good. The annual cycle of review and update ensures that the financial implications of strategic and service planning are accounted for in the medium-term financial plan (MTFP). This is reviewed twice a year and anticipates financial pressures and funding sources for the next three years. This ensures that resources are strategically realigned to priority areas.

**16 Comprehensive Performance Assessment | What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?**

- 40** Resources are targeted to priority areas. Following the major financial problems identified in 2004, the new management team systematically addressed areas where efficiencies could be made and redirected resources away from high cost administrative services to support priority services such as community safety and the environment. It has developed new approaches to service delivery and procurement, for example, through the East Lancashire Excellence Partnership (ELEP) and increased financial awareness amongst staff and councillors. It took difficult decisions to address weaknesses in some services and shifted away from a culture of direct service provision. This has resulted in the Council now having a stable financial standing and the ability to place additional resources to key priority areas.

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

### Capacity

- 41** The Council is performing adequately in this area. It has responded to weaknesses in its capacity identified in 2004. These related to management of finances, procurement and partnering. Political and managerial leadership is respected within the Council and beyond and decision making is effective. Scrutiny is developing well, with examples of positive impact. Human resource policies are making a difference to the organisational culture which is open and positive. Training and development for both councillors and staff is good. However there is more to do to address previous weaknesses in HR capacity. The Council has undertaken some of the work required to make sure its services are inclusive but a lack of a strategic approach to equalities and diversity has meant that it has failed to reach Level 2 of the equalities standard by its targeted date.
- 42** The Council has adequate financial capacity to deliver its priorities, although some weaknesses remain in its financial reporting. It has built up financial reserves over time from a negative base and reduced its debt burden to a point where it now has the financial capacity to deliver its priorities and cater for unforeseen emergencies. Through its medium-term financial planning process it is able to understand the future financial pressures it faces and plans for these. The Council has also been successful in securing significant external funding to deliver its priorities. For example, through Elevate it has secured £35 million over five years to deliver regeneration activity in the borough. There is a strong focus on efficiency; national targets for cashable efficiency targets have been exceeded by a factor of three. This has enabled the Council to allocate more resources to priority areas.
- 43** The strength of managerial and political leadership has resulted in a number of benefits, both within the Council and in partnership working, for which there are clear governance arrangements. It has been a key driver behind the Council's progress. In addition to the creation of a positive culture within the Council, it has enabled the Council to raise its profile within the region and earn the trust and respect of its partners and local communities. This forms the basis of the strong partnership working and community engagement on which the achievement of the Council's ambitions relies.

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

- 44 Relationships between members of different political groups and officers are positive. Despite the finely balanced political situation, all parties treat each other with respect and operate within an effective ethical framework. Portfolio holders have frequent contact with heads of service and are kept aware of issues affecting their services. They also work well together on cross-cutting issues, for example making links between initiatives to address community safety and health. The importance that the Council has given to community cohesion is illustrated by a specific portfolio for this issue. Councillors treat officers with respect and do not attempt to involve themselves in day-to-day operational issues. This has led to a climate of openness, support and respect across the Council providing a sound framework for effective, well informed and timely decision making.
- 45 Partnership working with partners from all sectors is strong. The Council is engaging well with the community and voluntary sector through their direct involvement in the neighbourhood management programme linked to housing market renewal and through the network of local area councils. The Council also has strong links with private sector partners. It has a reputation for its approachability, supporting local businesses, facilitating and enabling actions, for example through advice on planning issues, to enable them to develop and grow their business. This has created a strong joint commitment to the regeneration of the district.
- 46 The Council also works well with neighbouring authorities. It has developed close working relationships and improved capacity through sharing of skills and resources. A shared services agreement with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council allows access to strategic support on a wide range of issues. The councils share expertise and staff in urban regeneration and collaborate in providing services, including strategic housing, economic development and transport, community safety and performance management. The partnership has also led to successful bids for Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) funding, and to the Planning Advisory Service, which is enabling the councils explore areas where joint planning service delivery may be beneficial.
- 47 There is good partnership working with East Lancashire district councils through initiatives such as the East Lancashire E-Partnership which has resulted in financial savings through joint procurement and shared resources for community engagement. The development of a joint contact centre across five districts within Lancashire has meant that peaks and troughs in call volumes can be better managed. This provides better response times and customer care.
- 48 The Council is improving its capacity well through this open approach to service delivery. It has transferred a number of services, for example housing and cultural services, to external providers. This has resulted in financial benefits and service improvements. An innovative culture also exists within the Council. It has actively sought to supplement local knowledge and experience with fresh talent by drawing from larger and unitary authorities when recruiting managers. Examples include those in customer services/housing benefits and parks and open spaces. This ensures that the Council can maintain the skills it needs to deliver its priorities.

- 49 The Council makes good use of its engagement with local communities to increase capacity. Through the delegation of budgets to area councils and grants to local community groups, the Council empowers local people to undertake local projects which are having a positive impact on their quality of life.
- 50 There is a clear commitment to ensuring that the Council meets the needs of all communities of interest and people at risk of exclusion. Good progress is being made, however initiatives have not been captured in a structured way to enable the Council to formally satisfy Level 2 of the equalities standard for local government. The Council is addressing the gaps in its approach. Through external expertise, the Council has invested £25,000 to support improvements in this area and help it to progress through the next levels of accreditation. The lack of a structured approach to dealing with equalities and diversity issues creates a risk that the needs of the borough's diverse community are not being met in a co-ordinated and consistent way.
- 51 The Council has a good strategic, corporate approach to workforce planning, recruitment and development to ensure that current and future needs are met. Capacity has been enhanced by a significant reduction in sickness absence from 14.3 days per employee in 2003 to 8.49 days by 2007. However, previous vacancies in the Council's human resource (HR) team and a full programme of essential work have meant that plans to update the HR strategy were delayed. The Council has addressed this and plans are now being updated.
- 52 The Council has invested well to develop councillors' and staff skills through a comprehensive programme of training and development. Councillor development is managed through a corporate steering group. Training is reviewed regularly and attendance at training events is high. The Council's workforce survey and personal development plans are used to inform the corporate training and organisational development plan. The Council participates in the Lancashire Leadership Partnership to develop the skills of its managers.
- 53 The Council has an effective scrutiny process. It is well regarded and valued across the Council and is free from political influences. It receives good officer support which has enabled it to develop capacity to carry out meaningful and effective reviews which challenge the Council's performance, particularly in areas of under-performance such as housing benefits. Scrutiny members receive support and training to develop their skills and there are plans to improve engagement with the public as part of the scrutiny process. Previous call-ins have resulted in a more consultative approach being taken by the cabinet.
- 54 Risk management informs decision-making and planning at a corporate level with regular review mechanisms in place, this is embedded at a service level and within the Council's partnerships. The Council is improving value for money which has been assessed as good. Structures and processes for savings and efficiency gains are well embedded through regular monitoring by the corporate management team.

## Performance management

- 55 The Council is performing well in this area. There is a positive culture of performance management amongst councillors, managers and staff and a willingness to improve. The corporate centre takes an active role in ensuring there is a focus on improvement and in interpreting performance information to identify areas of concern. This approach is underpinned by a clear performance management framework with guidance in place. Performance in most services is improving and poor performance has been addressed. Management of performance within some partnerships is good.
- 56 A good performance management culture has developed over recent years. Staff are encouraged to understand their contribution to performance. For example, within the benefits service, senior officers set a strong example which cascades throughout department. There are regular reports to staff on their own and other teams' performance. This encourages staff to take a pride in their achievement and introduces an element of healthy competition. As a result poor performance has been turned round.
- 57 Performance monitoring and reporting arrangements are comprehensive and effective. Councillors have access to good quality monitoring information and portfolio holders have regular meetings with senior officers to discuss performance. The Council's performance management framework enables effective management of services through this focus. Particular attention is paid to service areas which are under-performing and the Council operates a special measures hierarchy. This enables senior managers to clearly understand what the performance issues are and how they might be addressed. This has resulted, for example, in turning around planning performance from bottom to top quartile performance in 2005/06.
- 58 There is a lack of visible integrated monitoring of BVPI performance, financial performance and project management. Finance and performance are reported and monitored separately. This means that there is a risk that decisions taken to address under performance may not take account of the financial implications.
- 59 The Council reports information about its performance to the public and partners in a coherent and accessible fashion. The Council publicises its performance through the Council newspaper, reception areas of its own offices, and its website and reports this to partners through the LSP. This means that local people and partners are able to have a good understanding about how the Council is performing in delivering its priorities.
- 60 Service plans provide a good basis for team and individual work-plans. Managers follow a corporate service planning model to ensure consistency, for example in reflecting equality and diversity and risk issues. These are linked to personal development reviews (PDRs) which are carried out annually. Staff briefings are held every six weeks and work-plans are reviewed two or three times a year. This means that all staff can understand how they contribute to delivering service outcomes.

- 61 The Council publicises the level of service that users can expect in most areas. It has developed standards for every service, which are reviewed each year. These are publicised by the Council and made available to service users. This means that the public are aware of the standard of service they should be able to expect and are able to contact the Council in the event of service failure.
- 62 Performance management within partnerships is good. The CDRP makes use of robust and relevant data upon which to base its discussion and decision making. There are arrangements in place to monitor the performance of service delivery partners such as Hyndburn Homes and the leisure trust. The Council has proactively shared its expertise with the new LSP which is updating its performance framework and monitoring arrangements and is implementing the same systems as the Council. It has also appointed a LSP manager and recruited a consultant to ensure that this will become embedded quickly.
- 63 Staff feedback is used to improve performance. The Council has a number of arrangements in place to enable staff to contribute their views. Staff in several services have a direct input into service design through regular team meetings. The Managing Director publishes a weekly bulletin with takes questions from staff on any topic and responds promptly. A biennial staff survey is carried out to ascertain views on a wide range of topics. These approaches provide regular opportunities to consult with officers from across the Council about ways to improve service delivery.
- 64 The Council is open to internal and external challenge to support its focus on customers and improve systems. For example, the Overview and Scrutiny committee takes part in a scrutiny officers and elected members forum to meet and discuss matters of common concern and interest and to disseminate information about work plans adopted by other councils across Lancashire. This provides councillors with the opportunity to identify good practice and any potential development needs.
- 65 The Council is proactive in identifying good practice and learning from others. This is a key element of the shared service approach with Blackburn with Darwen. There are a range of cross-departmental working groups such as for consultation and research, performance management and planning and regeneration. The Council has also benefited from its strong partnerships with the public sector and from recruiting experienced staff from elsewhere and is open to developing services in new ways to improve performance. It uses complaints to identify areas for improvement within services and make changes where needed. However, it has not yet developed its corporate complaints system to the point where feedback can be analysed to identify common areas for improvement and learn from complaints.
- 66 The Council responds well to feedback. There are many examples including implementing recommendations from the GONW and Audit Commission inspections. The Council also uses external consultants to evaluate and challenge service delivery and to transfer relevant skills.

## What has been achieved?

### Achievement and improvement

- 67 The Council is performing well in this area. It has turned round areas of poor performance, with improvement across a wide range of services from a low base. In 2005/06, 20 per cent of national performance indicators reflected best quartile performance compared to an average of 33 per cent. However, performance has improved over the past three years with 65 per cent of indicators (unaudited) improving. Many of these are in priority areas for the Council such as community safety, planning and waste management.
- 68 The Council demonstrates its strong ambitions to raise aspirations and improve the quality of life and has a good track record of partnership working to address its challenging agenda. It is making good progress in areas such as tackling crime, regeneration, economic development and environmental improvements and contributes well to the community strategy ambitions for health and wellbeing and education and lifelong learning.

### Community safety and cohesion

- 69 The Council is making a significant contribution to reducing crime and fear of crime - particularly in the most deprived areas where it is narrowing the gap between the worst and best wards. The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership performs well, and is highly regarded by both GONW and the Lancashire Constabulary. Regular reviews of its action plans are increasing confidence that all targets will be met by March 2008. LAA targets have also been achieved. The most significant reductions in crime are burglary and damage to buildings and dwellings, which have halved. Overall, crime in the borough has reduced by 27 per cent since 2004 through delivering partnership projects to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. These include 'crime and grime' initiatives, Neighbourhood Environmental Action Teams (NEATS), alcohol control zones and Altn8 projects, additional street lighting in hot spots and diversionary activities.
- 70 The Council is continuing to invest appropriately in community safety initiatives. It has allocated an additional £66,000 to fund additional community support officers. They work as part of a neighbourhood policing team which has reduced crime and the fear of crime. The Council has also made additional investment in CCTV and noise abatement projects through its partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Council. These investments have contributed to a 15 per cent reduction in the percentage of people who feel that crime needs to be reduced.

- 71 The Council is working well with a wide range of partners to improve community engagement and cohesion. This includes working with the Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Black and Minority Ethnic Forum to provide support, capacity building and training for BME groups and benefits advice for BME communities. The Council also works closely with the Hyndburn Community Network, which engages with 322 member organisations, to widen participation through outreach work to include emerging communities such as eastern European workers and their families and travellers. These initiatives not only help communities get on better together but help to raise aspirations and education and development opportunities of less advantaged people.

## **Housing and the environment**

- 72 The Council is taking a robust approach to deliver its housing market renewal projects. It is exceeding its target for new housing development and the statutory target for development on brownfield sites. Work is ongoing to maintain this focus in order to achieve a five year supply of land for new housing growth. In 2006, 20 per cent of the housing stock did not meet the decent homes standard (DHS). The Council's successful transfer of its housing stock, enabling additional investment of £35 million, means that it is now on target to achieve the standard by 2010. It has attracted significant funding to deliver improvements for vulnerable people living in privately owned properties. In 2005/06 over 500 private homes were made decent. To date over 270 low demand homes have been demolished, land has been assembled for new development and developers have been secured to provide 163 units of new mixed tenure housing in 2007/08. It has secured funding from the Housing Corporation to build 28 affordable homes for rent in Springhill and West Accrington.
- 73 Through effective homelessness services, the Council has reduced the time homeless residents spend in temporary accommodation between 2005/06 and 2006/07 by 73 per cent. In the same period, assistance to 192 vulnerable households has prevented homelessness.
- 74 The Council's environmental services are effective. The planning service performed well in 2005/06. Planning applications were processed quickly and the percentage of appeals allowed was low, which was within the best 25 per cent performance of all councils. The Council also performed well in dealing with waste. The whole population of Hyndburn is served by kerbside recycling which includes seven types of recyclable materials. It has exceeded its national target for recycling waste with 34 per cent achieved in 2006/07. It is reducing the volume of waste collected against the national trend through alternate weekly collections, encouraging people to compost and reuse their waste and was best quartile performance in 2005/06. Satisfaction with recycling is above average but despite good performance; satisfaction with refuse collection has fallen.
- 75 Neighbourhood management and 'crime and grime' initiatives have resulted in reduced fly tipping, graffiti and cleaner streets, especially in its most deprived areas. However 2005/06 comparisons show this to be within the worst 25 per cent of councils' performance and is reflected in the level of public satisfaction with the service. Between 2005/06 and 2006/07 the percentage of land littered to an unacceptable level (unaudited) has improved by 13 per cent.

76 The Council has made good progress in improving the environment of Hyndburn. Examples include:

- redevelopment of a derelict mill site which now includes a cycleway and 55 waterside apartments alongside retail and office units;
- landscaping improvements as part of the housing market renewal programme, making areas cleaner, greener and safer;
- funding of local improvement schemes through area councils. In 2006/07, more than £0.25 million was delegated to area councils to deliver schemes including clean up operations, nature reserves, skate facilities, village signs, bulb planting and employment of caretakers; and
- the £300,000 Floral Market Town scheme which was launched in Spring 2007 has resulted in marked visual improvements and raised aspirations.

Feedback from residents confirms that these initiatives are making a difference to pride in the local area. Key private and voluntary sector partners and town centre retailers are supportive as a result.

77 The Council is now broadening its focus on environmental issues effectively through the Environmental Initiatives Group. This group has made progress in implementing initiatives to recycle the Council's own waste, reduce energy consumption in Council offices and reduce carbon emissions from its vehicle fleet and those of its employees.

## **Employment and economy**

78 Through innovative partnership working, the Council has a strong track record of focusing on regenerating the borough, which is having a positive impact on the local economy. In 2006, 1,830 local businesses were registered for VAT. This represents a 6.1 per cent increase since 2000. The Council has pursued a number of major initiatives to support this, including:

- the Globe Centre – part of the redevelopment of five acres of derelict land and enhancement to the formerly run down Scaitcliffe area of Accrington securing a new employment site for 30 businesses and 1,000 employees; and
- the £7 million Accrington market square development has improved the town centre and attracted new stores to the town centre creating 65,000 square feet of new shops, new jobs, increasing footfall and enhancing vibrancy. Additional investment from established retailers has also been generated; and
- advice and support to local businesses on planning and other issues has helped them develop and grow their businesses and increase local employment opportunities.

- 79 The Council is also investing in a number of other projects which aim to continue the upward trend in the local economy:
- the allocation in the Regional Spatial Strategy for Whitebirk, a 32.6 hectare employment site straddling both boroughs of Hyndburn and Blackburn with Darwen, provides a key site for the generation of future employment opportunities;
  - work is ongoing on the development of the East Lancashire Rapid Transit system with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Lancashire County Council and a private sector partner to develop a new bus station in Accrington and improved connections and rail links in the city region; and
  - in partnership with three neighbouring authorities, the Council has secured £23.4 million through the Local Enterprise and Growth Initiative (LEGI) to improve the business support network and fund additional staff to improve access to jobs and opportunities.
- 80 The Council is making some progress in narrowing the gap between the least and most deprived wards. In 2006/07, benefits claims in the three priority wards with the largest claimant population (Central, Church and Springhill) have shown a reduction in claimants on key benefits for lone parents, job seekers' allowance and incapacity benefit of 2.7 per cent (compared to a borough wide reduction of 2.3 per cent). However, the success of targeted initiatives is masked by universal benefits take up campaigns to ensure that residents claim all the benefits they are entitled to. The Council has exceeded its annual LAA target of 1,500 'job outcomes' by 649, giving a total of 2,149 instances where people have come off benefits and been in employment for 6 months. Twenty-six per cent of these are from priority wards which also exceeds the annual target.
- 81 The Council has also worked closely with the County Council and Accrington and Rossendale College to improve skills levels to improve access to employment. The Hyndburn 14-19 Learning Consortium was established in 2006 and there have been targeted initiatives for NEETS with a particular focus on enterprise education. These have contributed to a significant reduction in the proportion of young people with no formal qualifications.

### **Culture and leisure**

- 82 The Council is making significant investment in initiatives which contribute well to improving the health of local people. However, the Council continues to perform poorly against national performance indicators. Targeted initiatives linked to the health agenda have improved participation by some vulnerable groups, but this has not translated into higher levels of participation across the whole community, where levels of participation in sport and active recreation are low. This has mainly been as a result of the quality of some of its own cultural and leisure facilities. Public satisfaction with sport and leisure facilities and parks and open spaces were both worst quartile performance in 2006/07.

83 Significant investments in cultural and leisure facilities in recent years have resulted in improvements visible to local people. There has been over £800,000 investment in parks and open spaces since January 2006. This has resulted in green flag awards for two parks, refurbishment of others and improved play facilities. Other improvements, such as a pets' corner, have been achieved through partnership working with local residents and 'friends of parks' groups. Parks also provide venues for community and multi cultural festivals. A further £500,000 investment has been made in new open space and dual use sports facilities. The Council has also worked with Accrington Stanley FC to improve playing field provision and provide coaching sessions for the local community. Working with schools resulted in a significant increase of 38 per cent in group visits to Haworth Art Galley in 2006/07. Customer satisfaction also increased by 5 per cent in 2006/07.

### **Health and wellbeing**

84 The Council is making a good contribution to the community strategy ambition to improve the health and wellbeing of local people. For example, it:

- is improving the housing conditions within the borough through the housing market renewal partnership ' Elevate' and other initiatives. Hyndburn Homewise has targeted 5,600 homes and has delivered 890 warm front grants, improved fire safety in 1,170 homes carried out 1,327 home security checks and identified extra benefits for 270 household worth £320,000;
- led on the introduction of the smoking ban locally including the early adoption of a smoke free workplace in July 2006; and
- contributes well to the Sports and Physical Activity Alliance. It is working locally with a wide range of partners to address obesity and provide leisure opportunities for young and older people. Through its leisure trust it has invested £1.2 million in facilities and provides free swimming and sports pitches hire during school holidays, a GP referral scheme, and reduced cost sports pitch hire. The Council has also completed the Hyndburn link of the National Cycle Network and arranged a range of community events to encourage cycling.

85 Strong operational liaison and joint working with the PCT and other agencies has resulted in good achievements. Examples include: delivering two Local Improvement Financial Trust (LIFT) schemes worth £15 million and help to secure a new dental education centre; allocating a full time officer to promote healthy workplace initiatives; working on a range of alcohol reduction schemes; reduction of speed limits in new housing developments; and commissioning work with Asian women's support groups to helping to address high infant mortality and other health issues. These initiatives will improve medical and dental provision and vulnerable people's awareness of how to improve their health.

## **Education and life long learning**

- 86** Similarly, the Council is helping to make an impact on educational opportunities and achievement in the borough through good joint working. For example, it:
- is working with Accrington College to re-engage with people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS) reducing the number by 15 per cent;
  - has appointed council employees to work with Lancashire Education Business Partnership to help young people prepare for work;
  - provided a classroom in Howarth Art Gallery to enable children with special education needs study for a GCSE in Art resulting in a 100 per cent pass rate;
  - developed reciprocal working with a local college, resulting in agricultural students working to improve parks in return for the use of a classroom in Oakhill park;
  - helped to deliver accessible early years provision through five Sure Start facilities in the most deprived areas and has made provision for a further three; and
  - successfully lobbied for the re-introduction of 6th form education to the borough.
- 87** By the end of 2006, 60.4 per cent of the working population possessed NVQ2 or above, compared with 54.5 per cent in 2000. The percentage of working population with no formal qualifications reduced from 22.9 per cent in 2003 to 15.7 per cent by the end of 2006.

## 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 Hyndburn Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 22 October to 26 October 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.