

Corporate Assessment Report

February 2008



Corporate Assessment

Poole 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 Poole Borough Council is performing well. With its partners it has developed a high level vision for the Borough which is based on a good understanding of local needs gained through effective consultation. The vision and the principles on which it is based emphasise the importance of creating a vibrant community in which people follow healthy lifestyles, feel included and contribute positively to the environment and their communities. The shared vision is realistic and challenging. The Council's corporate objectives support the vision and describe the role that the Council will play in delivery. Consequently a clear strategic statement exists of what the Council and its partners want to achieve.
- 6 Corporate priorities are in place. The Council's priorities are reviewed annually to ensure that they continue to reflect local need. They are based on good intelligence and research. This accurately describes both the demographic and economic context within which the Council works and specific issues such as where to target crime reduction initiatives and the needs of children and young people in an individual ward. The Council is focused on delivering its priorities and pro-actively moves resources to enable this. However the quality of service strategies is not consistent. This means that the Council is clear about what is important in the Borough but does not always document how it will deliver.
- 7 The Council demonstrates good community leadership. It successfully promotes the Borough's interests at national, regional and sub regional level. This has contributed to the Borough being given growth point status by government. The Council also successfully reconciled conflicting views about standardising the age of school transfer and secured support for this from parents, school staff and governors. At neighbourhood level it has worked successfully with the police and local communities to tackle deprivation and social exclusion. These actions have resulted in government support for key Council growth objectives, improved prospects for school children and enhanced quality of life for residents in deprived areas.
- 8 Political and managerial leadership is effective. Councillors provide clear policy direction and relationships between councillors, senior managers and staff are positive and supportive. The Chief Executive and strategic directors effectively coordinate the actions of service heads responsible for day-to-day service delivery. The Council's organisational culture empowers and motivates staff and its 'flat' organisational structure promotes effective communication and clear accountability. Staff are clear about what is expected of them, adopt a 'can do' culture and have a proactive approach to problem solving and service delivery.

- 9 The Council achieves good value for money. Key documents, such as the medium-term financial strategy, annual budgets and the capital programme focus on delivering corporate objectives. The Council supplements its own capacity through good partnership working and by successfully securing external funding to address its priorities. The quality of the Council's services compares favourably with other unitary councils and costs are relatively low. These features contributed to the Council being judged as 'performing well' in its value for money assessment in each of the past two years.
- 10 The Council is building capacity by tackling known weaknesses effectively. Its business transformation programme identifies ten work streams including building on the success of phase one of the 'Customer First' initiative, improvements to the way the Council manages its staff and a more consistent approach to risk management. It is also reviewing its governance arrangements to encourage internal challenge, clarify how councillors not on the Cabinet can influence policy and to minimise potential conflicts of interest. These measures have the potential to save £2 million a year to be reinvested in priority services and demonstrate that the Council is committed to continuous improvement.
- 11 The Council's strategic approach to diversity is good but operational aspects are underdeveloped. Consultation with staff groups representing employees from minority communities has had limited impact. The Council has achieved level two (out of five) of the local government equalities standard and is working towards level three by 2009. It actively supports the Dorset Race Equality Council and, with its partners, has adopted the '*Poole without Prejudice*' forum to progress issues relevant to minority communities. It is also working with the Roman Catholic Church to improve its understanding of the needs of migrant workers. It supports a very good faith network and promotes contact with people from BME communities through the *Cosmopolitan* network. However it has yet to achieve positive outcomes for minority groups by consistently using equality impact assessments in all service areas. Consequently the Council has yet to use its understanding of the needs of all residents to inform service delivery.
- 12 Access to services is good and improving for most people but less so for people with disabilities. The Council opened a centralised call centre in July 2007 which deals with half of all telephone calls and emails. It has plans to increase this in the future. The Council's website is easy to use and provides information about services as well as access to the complaints policy and a range of online functions. However physical access to services for people with disabilities is variable with some improvements to public transport but low levels of access to Council buildings.

- 13 Performance monitoring systems are not robust. The Council is investing in a new monitoring system. Until this is operational portfolio holders and strategic directors are monitoring performance by maintaining close contact with service heads and by attending twice yearly performance forums. The quality of action plans supporting strategic priorities is not consistently good and financial and performance monitoring information is not linked to enable councillors and officers to assess whether the Council is systematically achieving value for money. The Council is a learning organisation and uses customer feedback and satisfaction data to inform service delivery.
- 14 The Council successfully delivers local and national priorities. Its land use policies promote a diverse local economy and have improved the availability of affordable housing. They promote brown field development and improve the existing built environment while protecting natural heath land and the harbour. The community safety partnership achieves good outcomes and crime levels and the fear of crime have fallen over the last three years. Local health outcomes are generally above the national average although significant variations exist with people living in deprived areas faring less well. The Council and its partners are tackling this disparity by focussing their efforts on the most deprived wards and on improving the health of children and young people. The Partnerships for Older People Project (POPP) concentrates on areas of highest need and supplements good social care provision and a comprehensive range of services to promote healthy and safe living for older people. Children and young people living in Poole achieve good levels of education, are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and generally feel safe. The number of young people not engaged in employment, education or training is low.

Areas for improvement

- 15 The Council needs to improve some aspects of its governance arrangements by:
 - clarifying the roles and functions of overview and scrutiny committees to enable robust debate of future policy proposals and constructive internal challenge;
 - ensuring that clear separation exists between the roles of planning policy makers and those responsible for implementation; and
 - securing a consistent approach to the governance arrangements for partnerships.
- 16 The Council needs to improve its approach to equalities and diversity by:
 - strengthening the strategic framework and securing consistent compliance throughout the Council; and
 - setting clear, outcome based targets to ensure that services consistently meet the needs of all residents.
- 17 The Council needs to improve its performance management practices by:
 - improving the quality of service strategies to clarify how strategies will be delivered and how they contribute to Council priorities;
 - ensuring that action plans include clear definitions of required action, timescales, measurable targets linked to improved outcomes, accountability and resource implications; and
 - strengthening the links between strategic and service level performance management.

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

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

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

Context

The locality

- 18 The Borough of Poole is in the south west of England. It covers an area of 65 square kilometres and borders Bournemouth to the east, the districts of Purbeck to the west and East Dorset to the north. The Borough's southern border is marked by the largest natural harbour in Europe. With Bournemouth and Christchurch, Poole comprises the second largest urban area in the south west behind Bristol.
- 19 Poole has a population of 138,000. The majority (96 per cent) of Poole residents are 'white British' with relatively small representation of people from other ethnic origins. Statistically the largest of these are of Irish origin (0.6 per cent). The largest number of people of 'non white' ethnic origin are Chinese people who comprise 0.3 per cent of the population. The number of migrant workers in Poole is increasing. In 2005/06, 710 new national insurance numbers were issued. This figure increased by almost a quarter to 880 in 2006/07 and migrant workers now account for 1.04 per cent of the working age population. The majority of migrants are Polish and are employed in unskilled manufacturing.
- 20 The Borough has a relatively large proportion of older people which is increasing. Currently 40 per cent of the population are aged over 50 exceeding the national average of 33.4 per cent. The Council estimates that by 2026 people over 50 will comprise 47 per cent of the population. Conversely it expects the proportion of people in the 20 to 49 age group to reduce from 38 per cent to 34 per cent.
- 21 The Borough has 64,032 dwellings, approximately half of which were built between the mid 1960s and the early 1990s. The level of owner occupation is high at 79 per cent and average house prices are among the highest in the country. In mid-2005 the average house price in Poole was £251,367 - exceeding the national average of £190,681 by 32 per cent. The area of Sandbanks has some of the most expensive properties outside of London and residential land values in this part of the Borough are among the highest in the world.
- 22 The level of economic activity in Poole is high. Unemployment at 1 per cent of the working population is lower than both the regional (1.2 per cent) and national (2.1 per cent) averages. Average weekly earnings are £462, exceeding the national (£459) and regional (£422) averages. Most industry types are represented in Poole with major sectors being distribution and tourism (26 per cent), public administration (24 per cent) and finance and IT (21 per cent). Manufacturing comprises 15 per cent of local employment. Significant local employers include Sunseeker, Siemens and Barclays bank.

- 23 Levels of deprivation in Poole are generally low. The Borough is ranked 225th out of 354 areas nationally (where 354 is the least deprived). However, 4 out of 91 of Poole's super output areas are in the 25 per cent most deprived areas in England and 9.8 per cent of the population live in low income households. Residents of these areas are more likely to experience health inequalities and unemployment and children are less likely to achieve good educational standards. Tackling these issues are significant challenges for the Council and its partners.
- 24 Poole has been identified by the government as an area for future growth. The Draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy proposes a further 10,000 new homes by 2026 and an additional 19,000 jobs in the Poole travel to work area. The scarcity of land in the Borough and the need to protect the natural environment means that the Council can only achieve these targets by maximising the use of available land and bringing forward large brown field development sites in and around the town centre. One such site is in Hamworthy and includes the site of a former power station. To make this site economically viable the Council has been negotiating with government to fund a second bridge across the harbour, known locally as the 'Twin Sails'.

The Council

- 25 Poole Borough Council comprises 42 councillors. Elections are held every four years. The most recent elections in May 2007 resulted in the Conservative group retaining control of the Council with 25 councillors and the Liberal Democrat group of 17 councillors forming the opposition.
- 26 The Council uses the Leader and Cabinet style of governance. The Cabinet is made up of the Leader, Deputy Leader and seven portfolio holders from the Conservative Group. Portfolios relate to the Local Economy; Environment; Children's Social Services, Education and Youth services; Leisure; Transportation and Schools for the Future; Resources and Equalities, Inclusion and Active Communities. The Cabinet is supported by six overview groups (Environment, Community Support, Resources, Transport, Children's Services and Local Economy) providing policy advice. It has six area committees.
- 27 The activities of the Cabinet are examined by three scrutiny committees which focus on Health, Community Support and Education and Service Provision and Audit. The Council also has a 'Call In' Scrutiny Committee and regulatory committees dealing with Standards, Planning and Licensing.
- 28 The professional management of the Council is provided by the Chief Executive supported by five strategic directors responsible for corporate and strategic change leadership. Operational service delivery is managed by 19 service heads.

- 29 The Council employs 3,737 full time equivalent people in 2007/08. Its budget provides for £278 million to be spent on day-to-day management and service delivery. It also includes a further £20 million to be spent on capital projects. Council tax increased by 4.5 per cent in 2007/08 and the Band D charge is £1,069. This compares favourably with the unitary council average of £1,103 but the average amount paid by residents is £1,173, reflecting the relatively high property values in the Borough.
- 30 The Council works in a number of partnerships. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was developed in 2002 and is known as the Poole Partnership. It includes public sector organisations such as the primary care trust (PCT) and police as well as voluntary sector organisations including Age Concern and local groups representing specific interests such as the Alzheimers Society and local sports groups. The Council and its partners are currently working to deliver its Local Area Agreement (LAA) and are working with Bournemouth Council and Dorset County Council to develop a Multi Area Agreement (MAA).

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

Ambition

- 31 The Council is performing well in this area. With its partners it has developed a high level vision for the Borough that links well to its own objectives. The high level vision is based on a good understanding of local needs gained through effective consultation. The Council works well in partnership, notably with the Poole Partnership, Bournemouth Borough Council and the police. It successfully promotes the interests of the Borough at national and sub-regional level and demonstrates good community leadership.
- 32 Partners share a high level vision for Poole. The Poole Partnership's community strategy '*Shaping Poole's Future*' describes this vision as '*Poole is a vibrant town, with strong communities, where people enjoy healthy lifestyles, care about their environment and support each other*'. The strategy describes how the partnership will deliver this vision by working through seven key partnership groups. It also refers to the importance of the principles of equality of access and opportunity and sustainable development in delivering its vision. This vision and associated principles provide a clear statement of what the Council and its partners want to achieve and how they will deliver.
- 33 The Council's objectives clearly support delivery of the shared vision. Its corporate strategy '*Striving for Excellence*' describes five objectives: '*Supporting Children and Young People; Promoting Health and Well-being; Protecting Poole's Environment; Strengthening our Communities; and Developing a Dynamic Economy*.' The objectives relate to aspects of the shared vision, and the strategy defines specific short-term outcomes for each objective and particular areas for improvement. In this way it is clear how the Council's strategic objectives support delivery of the shared vision and how it will play its part in delivering the vision.
- 34 The Council's vision is challenging but realistic. Although levels of deprivation are generally low there are pockets of relative deprivation where health inequalities and unemployment issues are challenging. In addition children and young people living in deprivation are less likely to achieve good educational standards. The Council also faces considerable challenges in reconciling environmental protection with providing affordable housing and developing a dynamic economy. The Council achieves this by balancing the number of jobs with the size of the working population, promoting brown field development, improving the existing built environment and protecting heath land and the harbour. This reduces travel to work distances for many residents, secures effective use of available land and protects the natural environment.

- 35 The Council consults extensively to inform its strategic plans. The Poole Opinion Panel (POP) consists of approximately 1,500 residents who take part in two or three surveys each year and are invited to take part in discussion groups on topical issues such as transport, community safety and the quality of customer service provided by the Council. The Council website also invites people to submit their views as part of structured consultation exercises or about things that are important to them. This consultation is supplemented by an annual '*State of the Area*' debate and the Leader of the Council personally presents annual budget proposals to area committees to solicit feedback. These activities ensure that the Council incorporates the views of local residents.
- 36 Good strategic engagement exists between the Council and its diverse communities. The Council's Promoting Equality, Respecting Diversity Policy (PERD) is supported by an action plan. In addition people with disabilities are actively engaged in town centre design and transport developments. The Council actively supports the Dorset Race Equality Council and, with its partners, has adopted the '*Poole without Prejudice*' forum to progress issues relevant to minority communities. It works closely with partners to understand and meet the needs of gypsies and travellers and plans to expand an existing site for travellers to include a multi-agency resource centre. It is also working with the Roman Catholic Church to improve its understanding of the needs of migrant workers, many of whom attend church. It supports a very good faith network and promotes contact with people from BME communities through the *Cosmopolitan* network, initially created for business leaders but now extended to include community representatives. These measures help the Council and its partners understand the needs of all sections of the community.
- 37 The Council demonstrates good community leadership. It has reconciled conflicting views about standardising the age of school transfer across the Borough and secured support for this from parents, school staff and governors. At neighbourhood level it has worked successfully with the police and local communities in Turlin Moor and Rossmore to tackle deprivation and social exclusion by promoting diversionary activities for young people and working with the community to improve the environment. These initiatives are expected to improve the performance of children at Key Stage 2 and substantially improved the quality of life for residents in deprived areas.
- 38 The Council uses national and sub regional opportunities well to support its ambitions. It successfully lobbied the government to achieve growth point status for the area to support its economic development and housing objectives and worked successfully to secure pilot status for a multi area agreement with Bournemouth Borough Council and Dorset County Council to facilitate a coordinated approach to economic development. It has also secured £90 million with Bournemouth Borough Council (of which £35 million is for Poole schools) for the development of new school infrastructure under the government's 'Schools for the Future2' programme. These examples illustrate how the Council promotes the interests of the Borough in the sub-region.

- 39 Strategic partnership working is effective in support of the Council's objectives. The Council promotes a suitable level of independence for the Poole Partnership by supporting an independent Chair, encouraging representatives from partner organisations to lead theme groups and making reward grant monies available to facilitate action. It also meets regularly with the Government Office of the South West (GOSW) and the Regional Development Agency and holds joint meetings with the Bournemouth Strategic Partnership. These arrangements contributed positively to the sub regional economic development strategy '*Raising the Game*' developed jointly by Poole, Bournemouth and Dorset County councils. Similarly the Council works closely with the voluntary and community sector, the Learning and Skills Council and the PCT. These measures ensure that the Council and its partners share a common purpose and engender trust and openness.

Prioritisation

- 40 The Council is performing well in this area. Annual priorities support the Council's ambitions and are understood and shared by staff and other stakeholders. They are based on a good understanding of the current and future needs of the Borough and are supported by good intelligence and research. The Council is focussed on delivering its priorities in a coordinated way and pro-actively moves resources to enable this. It places appropriate emphasis on building corporate capacity to sustain delivery of current and future priorities by making its priority of '*improving efficiency and effectiveness*' integral to all activity. However, whilst some service strategies and action plans are good others are not.
- 41 The Council's priorities are clearly stated in its corporate plan. They are:
- revitalising our town centre;
 - transforming our schools for the future;
 - improving housing for local people;
 - reducing Poole's carbon footprint;
 - meeting the needs of our ageing population; and
 - improving efficiency and effectiveness.

These priorities effectively balance the national shared priorities of improving education, caring for older people and reducing carbon emissions with local priorities to regenerate the town centre, provide more housing for local people and build capacity to deliver future challenges.

- 42 The Council makes sure that priorities continue to reflect what is important to residents. It reviews its priorities annually. The emphasis on regenerating the town centre and building schools for the future has been carried forward from previous corporate plans as the Council considers it has more work to do. Other priorities such as reducing carbon emissions represent new challenges and opportunities for the Council and replace priorities that have been substantially delivered - such as the focus on 'customer first' which was a priority in the previous corporate plan. In this way the Council ensures that priorities remain current until such time as they are completed.
- 43 Stakeholders understand and share the Council's priorities. The Council leads on a number of Poole Partnership theme groups and this fosters a coordinated approach to identifying and delivering activity in priority areas. It worked closely with partners to develop a multi-agency approach to reducing the harmful effects of excessive alcohol consumption. It is also responsive to the views of staff and trades unions on issues such as organisational development and how its plans for '*Schools for the Future*' will complement other priorities by reducing energy consumption and increasing education opportunities for older people. These actions promote effective joint action to deliver priorities and help stakeholders contribute across a range of areas.
- 44 The Council's priorities are supported by good community engagement, effective research and needs analysis. Examples of good community engagement include customer panels to develop key services and extensive consultation with older people, BME communities, gay and lesbian people and people with disabilities to inform the Council's strategic plans to tackle crime and meet the needs of vulnerable people. In addition key demographic, economic and housing information is kept up-to-date by the Council's research team who publish a quarterly bulletin of key data. Other research is targeted at specific issues such as joint work with the police on the safer neighbourhoods initiative where localised profiling is used to determine where greatest impact could be made. In a similar way the children and young people's plan is informed by a detailed needs analysis which has recently been refreshed and helped the Council devise a child vulnerability index for each ward which is used to measure outcomes. This information helps the Council understand current and future need and to target activity where it is most needed.
- 45 The means by which priorities will be delivered is clear, activity is well coordinated and progress is systematically reviewed. Each priority is the responsibility of a strategic director who works closely with the appropriate portfolio holder to manage delivery. Priorities are the subject of programme management techniques and project plans describe how work streams will be delivered and identify resource requirements. Progress is regularly reviewed by portfolio holders and overview and scrutiny committees as well as senior managers and project delivery staff. An important element of this is building corporate capacity to deliver priorities by making the business transformation programme to '*improve efficiency and effectiveness*' integral to all Council activity. This ensures that the Council is focussed on delivering its priorities in a cohesive way.

18 Corporate Assessment | What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 46** Some service strategies and linked action plans are good but others are not. The Housing Strategy and the Children and Young People's Plan both clearly set out the issues to be tackled and define ambitious targets supported by clear action plans. The Local Transport Plan (LTP) identifies the priorities for Poole as part of south east Dorset but it is not clear how delivery will be managed. Service unit plans are inconsistent in defining lead responsibilities, resource requirements, milestones and targets. Plans describing how the Council will manage business transformation and reduce the Council's 'carbon footprint' priority are at an early stage of development. Consequently plans describing how the Council will deliver all its priorities are not consistently robust.
- 47** The Council systematically moves money to priority services and away from non priorities. The medium term financial strategy is reviewed each year. It allocates resources to priority areas in both capital and revenue budgets. These allocations are reflected in service delivery plans. Recent examples include in 2005/06 the Council's '*Customer First*' priority was supported by £2.6 million of capital funding and an annual revenue budget of £1 million. In 2007/08 the revenue budget was increased by £2.8 million. This growth, coupled with efficiency savings, has been used to support £200,000 to implement business transformation, £1.3 million to meet the needs of the ageing population and £1.5 million to support '*Schools for the Future*'. In contrast budgets for art and culture have been 'frozen' in each of the past two years. Consequently the Council's spending plans support delivery of its priorities.

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

Capacity

- 48 The Council's performance in this area is adequate. Political and managerial leadership is supportive and organisational cultures empower and motivate staff to provide good quality services. The Council manages its finances well and achieves good value for money through strong partnership working and by securing external funding to support its priorities. Access to services is good and improving for most people but less so for people with disabilities. The Council is tackling its weaknesses, notably poor governance, an inconsistent approach to HR management, risk management and maximising engagement with employees from minority communities. It is beginning to implement ambitious plans to build internal capacity. These factors demonstrate scope for improvement in the way that the Council uses available resources to produce good outcomes in tackling national and local priorities.
- 49 Political and managerial leadership is effective. Councillors provide clear policy direction that is widely understood by staff and partners. Relationships between councillors, senior managers and staff are positive and supportive. The Chief Executive and strategic directors provide good support to and effectively coordinate the actions of service heads responsible for day-to-day service delivery. Staff feel well managed, are clear about what is expected of them and perform well. This promotes a 'can do' culture and a proactive approach to problem solving and service delivery.
- 50 The Council's organisational culture motivates middle managers by providing clear accountability and effective communication. The Council operates a 'flat' organisational structure with relatively few tiers of management. Strategic directors are responsible for maintaining focus on corporate priorities and for coordinating the actions of service heads. Portfolio holders work closely with directors to progress corporate priorities and with service heads on service delivery issues. Service heads also work in 'theme groups' to promote effective cross departmental working. Consequently middle managers are clear about what is expected of them.

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

- 51** Some elements of governance arrangements are weak. The arrangements for scrutiny are confused with no clear demarcation between the responsibilities of scrutiny committees and those of overview committees. Scrutiny committees are not well supported and do not contribute effectively to policy formulation or provide an effective challenge to the actions of Cabinet. The Council is currently reviewing these arrangements with a view to combining the scrutiny and overview functions. Clear separation of the roles of policy makers and those responsible for implementing policy in planning does not exist. Some Cabinet members are included on the development control committee and others attend occasionally as substitutes. Consequently effective challenge to the Cabinet and actions to minimise potential conflicts of interest and reputational risk are limited.
- 52** The quality of governance arrangements in partnerships is generally good but with some exceptions. Some partnerships such as the Children's Shadow Board of the Poole Partnership demonstrate clear roles and accountabilities and have clear reporting and decision making processes. In contrast arrangements with the voluntary sector are less clear, particularly those directing the Council's involvement with relatively small, local organisations. This leads to a lack of consistent, clear direction and accountability in some services and does not promote effective coordinated activity.
- 53** The Council achieves good value for money and manages spending within available resources. The medium-term financial strategy, budgets and capital programme are soundly based and are focused on delivering priorities and objectives. The level of reserves is comparable to other unitary councils having been increased by £1.8 million in 2006/07. Budget monitoring and control are satisfactory. The overall quality of services compares favourably with other unitary councils and costs are relatively low. The Council is meeting its Gershon targets and expects to exceed the cumulative target of £6.6 million by £0.5 million in 2007/08. These features contributed to the Council being judged as 'performing well' in its annual use of resources assessment in each of the past two years.
- 54** The Council secures external funding to help deliver local and national priorities. It will benefit from government grants of £14.4 million if it can agree a scheme to regenerate a major site in Hamworthy and it will receive £35 million to support its 'Schools for the Future' programme and £12 million targeted capital funding for schools. In addition it has received grants to support the refurbishment of the gypsy and traveller site (£1.7 million), the Waterfront Museum (£1 million), coastal management (£1.9 million), Partnerships for Older People (£0.8 million) and waste management (£0.27 million). This income supports delivery of Council priorities and supplements its own financial capacity.

- 55 Partnership working is strong. The Council works well with Bournemouth Borough Council. The two Councils produce joint strategies in services such as transport, environmental management and economic development and provide mutual support in activities such as emergency planning. They are working to develop shared services through jointly procuring a payroll and personnel computer system; sharing a works depot and improving future coordination of waste management issues by joint use of recycling facilities. Poole Borough Council also works well with registered social landlords to provide affordable housing, the police, notably to reduce anti social behaviour and the PCT to reduce health inequalities in deprived wards. Other successful partnerships include Brandon Care who have been commissioned to provide up to ten one-stop shops for older people. These partnerships enhance the Council's internal capacity and provide improved outcomes for service users.
- 56 Programme and project management arrangements are good but have yet to be rolled out to support change across the Council. The Council used the Office of Government Commerce approach to programme management to deliver its '*Customer First*' programme. This was supported by a project management methodology based on PRINCE2. Both techniques worked well and are being adopted as corporate standards. However relatively few experienced practitioners currently work for the Council. This scarcity of trained practitioners is limiting the pace at which the Council can introduce change.
- 57 Human resource (HR) management practices are inconsistent. Some issues such as absence, work life balance and equal pay are well managed. In contrast employee development interviews are not consistently held across all departments and councillor training needs are not assessed. Consequently training opportunities are not focussed on identified skills shortages or corporate need. No initiatives are in place to tackle recruitment difficulties in some professions and workforce planning is opportunistic. Consequently the Council is not maximising the potential of all its staff.
- 58 Risk management is not integrated into day to day service management. The Council achieves effective risk management of its priorities by using programme management arrangements. However progress towards embedding risk management throughout the organisation has been slow. The Council is working with consultants to develop consistent business continuity arrangements. As a result risks are not consistently informing service planning and delivery.
- 59 The Council's plans to build capacity through its business transformation programme are on track but at an early stage. It has set a target of £2 million efficiency savings to invest in priorities and to improve services. In order to achieve this it has identified ten projects including a review of accommodation, phase two of the '*Customer First*' initiative, updating its use of information technology and improving HR and asset management. Of these only phase two of '*Customer First*' and improving HR management processes are at the detailed planning stage. Other activities are yet to be defined. Consequently the Council has yet to fully exploit the potential identified in its business transformation programme.

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- 60 Access to services is good and improving for most people but less so for people with disabilities. The Council completed phase one of its *'Customer First'* programme in July 2007. This involved the creation of a centralised call centre to respond to customer enquiries in seven service areas. The centre is now dealing promptly with half of all telephone calls and emails received by the Council. Phase two of the programme is working to build on this success. The Council's web site is informative with a wide range of online functions, easy access to the complaints policy and links to other web sites which may be of interest. Physical access for people with disabilities is variable. The Council has worked with local bus operators to secure improvement but some Council buildings are not easily accessible for people with disabilities. Consequently it is easy to access services electronically but physical access for people with disabilities can be difficult.
- 61 The Council is slowly improving its approach to diversity. Equalities policies are not applied consistently and consultation with staff groups representing employees from minority communities has had limited impact. It has achieved level two (out of five) of the local government equalities standard and is working systematically towards level three by 2009. Some positive outcomes, such as improved services for gypsies and travellers, have resulted from equalities impact assessments but this is not yet consistent across all service areas. Consequently the Council is missing an opportunity to learn from its own staff and service delivery does not consistently meet the needs of residents from minority communities.

Performance management

- 62 The Council's performance in this area is adequate. The framework for performance monitoring and reporting is clearly established through the business planning process, and is well understood by staff. Feedback from service users and local people is used to drive improvement, but this information is not comprehensively collected or consistently used across the Council. Cabinet councillors and strategic directors are well informed about performance, and structures are in place to support organisational and shared learning. Performance management arrangements are weakened by the variable quality of action plans underpinning priorities.
- 63 Clear links exist between corporate plans and strategies, service plans and individual objectives. The corporate strategy sets out key objectives, priorities and indicators by which progress will be measured. These are included in service unit business plans and performance monitoring reports providing a clear focus for service unit performance management. These links make it clear what each team and member of staff are contributing to service unit and corporate objectives.

- 64 Performance monitoring systems are not robust. The Council recognises this and is investing in new monitoring processes to monitor its own performance and that of its partners. Until these are operational each cabinet member has a specific portfolio of responsibilities and takes the lead on reporting to Cabinet on both service and financial performance. In addition to regular monthly meetings with the service unit head, they also attend twice yearly performance forums where service unit business performance is reviewed in detail, including an assessment of financial performance and risk. Strategic directors review performance reports before they are presented to Cabinet, and progress is monitored at monthly senior management team meetings. As a result the Council is knowledgeable about current progress despite the absence of a comprehensive performance management system.
- 65 The Council and its partners monitor joint performance effectively. Officers review progress against key plans and local area agreement targets, best value and local performance indicators each month. In addition performance is reviewed quarterly by key committees of the Council and the Poole Partnership. The LAA performance management group also conducts a half-yearly review of progress towards achieving LAA targets. As a result the Council and its partners are very clear about whether or not targets are being met.
- 66 Action plans supporting strategic priorities are not consistently robust. Key actions are not consistently defined and responsibility for delivery is frequently unclear. The quality of targets varies. Some targets, such as performance indicators, are clear and support service improvement. Others focus on process such as *Develop Quality Assurance strategy* or *Identify and implement continual improvement opportunities for staff training* and lack specific measures to judge progress. In addition it is not always clear how targets relate to corporate priorities. This weakens performance management.
- 67 The link between financial and performance monitoring information is not sufficient to effectively review value for money. Financial information is included in key performance monitoring reports, and performance management structures have a financial remit. For example, the performance management group for the LAA prioritises shared budgets from LPSA reward grants. Sub-partnerships also have arrangements to review priorities and manage resources, such as the resources group in the Poole Safe Together Partnership. The Borough works with others to compare and evaluate processes, costs and outcomes but little evidence exists of impact from this work. Whilst all service units are involved in some comparative exercises and benchmarking activity, examples of the difference this has made in terms of increased quality or reduced costs are limited.

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- 68 The Council makes good use of action plans to tackle poor performance in specific areas. In response to low customer satisfaction with the way that complaints were dealt with it produced and implemented an action plan to secure improvement. This included the appointment of a complaints officer to coordinate action which has contributed to improvements in the way that complaints are dealt with. Similar action plans have been used to improve performance in adult social care and planning. In this way the Council focuses its attention on areas where improvement is most needed.
- 69 The Council makes good use of customer feedback and satisfaction data to inform service delivery. The Poole Opinion Panel and the customer service centre gather information about how service users view the Council's performance. Services that have been improved in this way include more coordinated responses to flooding and beach hut bookings. The Council and its partners also used specific feedback from children and young people to inform their approach to issues such as police training in relation to the alcohol strategy, how bus companies tackle children's behaviour on buses and to change summer activity schemes. As a result the Council is better able to understand and meet customer needs.
- 70 The Council is good at keeping local people informed of its performance and progress against its priorities. The Council's newspaper - Poole News - is used to convey borough-wide information and is supplemented by local newsletters in specific neighbourhoods. Examples include the Rossmore safer neighbourhoods community newsletter and a similar publication for the Bourne estate. These newsletters convey progress towards achieving aims and objectives and are also used to gather information from local people about further improvements. In this way the Council responds to local people by describing action taken and encouraging further feedback.
- 71 The Council is a learning organisation that shares experiences. The corporate business planning process requires service units to review past performance, customer complaints and feedback and satisfaction data when planning service improvements. The Council also supports a mentoring scheme, a comprehensive training programme and corporate working groups in topics such as equality, business planning and risk management. These initiatives facilitate shared learning across departments.
- 72 The Council responds well to internal and external challenge. It commissioned an external review of its lead practitioner budget holding pilot before committing to investing further in this approach to locality working for children's services. In addition an internal review of progress on the business transformation programme increased the focus on benefits realisation that will strengthen programme management. This evaluative approach contributes to making the Council more effective.

What has been achieved?

- 73 The Council is achieving well. Its corporate vision describes a town that is economically vibrant and promotes strong communities of healthy individuals who value their environment. It is working well to deliver this vision. It effectively balances the national shared priorities of improving education, caring for older people and reducing carbon emissions with local priorities to regenerate the town centre, improve local housing and build capacity to deliver future challenges.
- 74 The Council is delivering national priorities. It is tackling community safety through effective multi-agency working and by integrating it with routine service delivery. The community safety partnership compares favourably with others and is on track to meet national targets. Crime levels and fear of crime have fallen over the last three years. The Council and its partners are among the best performers nationally or above average in all but one of the six 'key' performance indicators covering household, vehicle and crimes against the person. Similarly the Council and its partners have clear targets and plans to improve health and reduce inequalities. Local health outcomes are generally above the national average with average life expectancy for females being best quartile at 83 years (national average 81.4) and above the national average for men (national average 77.3 years) at 78.1. People living in deprived areas fare less well than those in more affluent areas and the Council and its partners are focusing their efforts on the most deprived wards and on improving the health of children and young people. The Council takes a strategic approach to meeting the needs of older people. Effective partnership working contributes to good social care and a comprehensive range of services is in place to promote healthy and safe living for older people.
- 75 The Council performs well in delivering local priorities. It was among the best performing councils nationally for providing affordable housing during the three year period to March 2006 when 495 new affordable houses were completed. In addition it is on target for all its housing stock to meet the decent homes standard by 2010 and has already achieved the government target for 70 per cent of vulnerable households in the private sector to comply with the standard. It successfully promotes the local economy and balances the number of jobs with the size of the working population to reduce travel to work distances. Land use policies promote brown field development enabling the Council to achieve 100 per cent of development on brown field sites in each of the past three years. This helps to improve the existing built environment while protecting natural heath land and the harbour. Its '*Customer First*' priority has also improved access to public services, particularly for older people.

- 76 Key performance indicators demonstrate that the Council's services are good and improving. In 2006/07 the Council had 42 per cent of key performance indicators in the best quartile nationally. This exceeded the average for all single tier councils of 30 per cent. The Council has improved 70 per cent of its key performance indicators in the three years to 2006/07 (the average range for all single tier authorities is 73.7 per cent to 76.3 per cent). Residents' overall satisfaction with the Council has also improved over the last three years. The BVPI User Survey for 2006/07 showed that 63 per cent of residents were satisfied with the Council overall. This compares favourably with 53 per cent in 2003/04 and places the Council among the 25 per cent best performing councils in the country.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 77 The Council has contributed positively to a vibrant and healthy local economy. Subject to reaching an agreement with a suitable developer it has secured £14.4 million of government funding to build a second harbour bridge. This will facilitate the development of a major regeneration site. It has also been instrumental in enabling the Sunseeker boat building company to expand by supporting an agreement between the company, the RDA and the Harbour Commissioners. This agreement will consolidate Sunseeker's status as one of the largest employers in the Borough. The Council also contributed to the recent decision by the Bank of New York to open an office in the Borough creating 200 new jobs. It has exceeded its LPSA target (150) by enabling 165 employees of small businesses to attend accredited training courses and has exceeded its local plan target for making employment land available. These activities contribute to a diverse local economy characterised by low unemployment.
- 78 The Council performs well in housing. Overall housing completions are on target to meet the requirements of the regional spatial strategy for the period 2006-2026 of 500 housing units per annum. The Council rigorously applies its 40 per cent affordable housing target and works with private developers and four 'preferred RSL partners'. Where appropriate it makes its own land available for development at less than market cost to facilitate affordable housing provision. During the three-year period to March 2006, 495 new affordable houses were completed which represents best quartile performance. The Council's arms length management organisation, Poole Housing Partnership, is on target for 100 per cent compliance with the decent homes standard by 2010 and the Council has already achieved the target for 70 per cent of vulnerable households in the private sector. These activities improve the availability and quality of housing in the Borough.

- 79 Planning performance is mixed. Developers consider staff to be helpful and planning processes easy to work with. The Council was awarded the Royal Town Planning Institute national award in 2005 for its regeneration master plan and the Seldown Eco Village achieved an award for the best new social housing scheme at the 2006 Excellence in Housing Awards. The Council has also achieved 100 per cent use of brown field development sites in each of the past three years. In contrast it failed to meet government targets for the prompt processing of applications in 3 out of 4 categories in 2006/07. This represents an emphasis on quality development rather than prompt processing of applications.
- 80 The Council has an incomplete approach to waste management. The Council recycled 33.6 per cent of waste in 2006/07. This represented an improvement over 2005/06 when 28.4 per cent of waste was recycled and enabled the Council to achieve the government target of 30 per cent. Public satisfaction with both waste collection and recycling was best quartile in 2006/07 as was the cost of waste collection per household. However the amount of waste collected is relatively high and the Council has yet to introduce effective waste minimisation initiatives in all parts of the Borough. For example home composting has been introduced in some parts of the Borough but not others. Similarly the Council is piloting an environment award for schools to encourage waste minimisation, recycling and reduce litter but this has yet to be rolled out to all schools.
- 81 The Council promotes public transport but has had little success in reducing reliance on the private car. It has invested £1.6 million in real time passenger information systems and worked with local transport providers to improve access to key destinations such as the hospital and town centre shops. It has also improved access to public transport for people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, notably people with learning difficulties. As a result bus passenger numbers have significantly increased and the Council has achieved its LPSA targets. Despite this the Council does not have its own travel plan and does not consistently promote sustainable travel for schools and businesses. Consequently while bus patronage has increased this has made little overall difference to congestion in the Borough.

Safer and stronger communities

- 82 The Council has shown strong community leadership in tackling community safety through effective multi-agency working and integrating community safety into the delivery of its services. The safer neighbourhoods initiative has enabled partners to target resources effectively to address issues of local concern through a joint approach to prevention and enforcement. The community safety partnership compares favourably with others in terms of crime levels and is on track to meet national targets. As a result, crime levels and fear of crime have fallen over the last three years.

- 83 The approach to tackling anti-social behaviour is effective. Neighbourhood task groups and initiatives for young people such as *'football focus'* have addressed local anti-social behaviour and successfully integrated children and young people into the community. Good communication exists between the Council, its partners and the community. This promotes a shared understanding of how to tackle anti-social behaviour. Reporting of anti-social behaviour incidents has increased enabling the police to take appropriate action. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of people who perceive it as a problem. Consequently the Council and its partners have worked with the community to reduce anti-social behaviour and the fear it creates.
- 84 The Council uses partnership working effectively to reduce domestic violence. Initiatives include fast track court hearings at specialist domestic violence courts, financial support for a refuge for victims of domestic violence and their children, the provision of 'safe' rooms for victims in their homes and awareness programmes to promote better understanding of how to prevent and tackle domestic violence. These measures are supporting victims to report abuse and to take effective action through the courts.
- 85 Action to tackle drug and alcohol misuse is effective. Enhanced drug education programmes are in place at all schools and support is readily available for children whose parents misuse substances. The Drug Action Team has increased the number of people receiving treatment for addiction and staying on treatment programmes. Shared care schemes in GP practices in the most deprived wards help to improve access to services for people with addictions. The Council and police are working with licensees to understand and tackle alcohol and drug misuse in public places. Consequently understanding has improved of the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse, addicts are being better supported and the number of related crimes has reduced.
- 86 The Council is working well with partners to reduce accidents. As a result of targeted road safety initiatives fatal or serious injuries on Poole's roads have reduced by 31 per cent in the last five years. The Council is on track to meet its local area agreement stretch targets for reducing road accident fatalities and casualties for adults and children. Good joint working with the fire and rescue service has targeted home fire risk checks at vulnerable groups. These initiatives have led to a reduction in deaths and injuries from accidents.
- 87 Emergency planning arrangements are well developed. The Council plays an active role with partners through the Bournemouth and Poole Resilience Group (BPRG). Emergency arrangements are communicated via the BPRG website, local press and through the faith sector. An incident response plan is in place based on an up-to-date multi-agency community risk register. Plans are tested regularly and learning from major incidents such as the Hamworthy Co-op fire is used to strengthen arrangements. Consequently the Council and its partners are well placed to tackle emergency situations.

- 88 The Council is working effectively with partners to promote community cohesion in some areas. It is working with partners to develop a detailed understanding of the needs of some minority groups, notably migrant workers, but this has yet to influence service delivery. It is working well with gypsies and travellers in Alderney to integrate them into the community and is currently refurbishing an existing site to improve facilities and provide a multi-agency resource centre. It is working through the *Poole without Prejudice* partnership to tackle all forms of prejudice and hate crime. An important part of this is encouraging the reporting of incidents to enable action to be taken and provide reassurance to victims. Work is also being done in schools to reduce bullying. These initiatives are helping to build cohesive communities and promote understanding.

Healthier communities

- 89 The Council and its partners are delivering shared action plans for improving health for everyone in Poole, including their own staff. They are promoting exercise through Active Healthlink, smoking cessation, and healthy eating for all, in order to improve health outcomes so people are healthier for longer. This is resulting in some improvement, for example, increased take up of exercise and good progress on the Healthy Schools initiative – with 78 per cent of children reporting last year that they had been encouraged to eat more healthily. However, not all targets are on track. For example, the PCT is taking the lead on addressing the shortfall in the smoking cessation target where achievement is at about two-thirds of the target number of quitters. These initiatives demonstrate a strong partnership approach to health improvement for all.
- 90 Information is shared between partners to better understand health inequalities. For example, investment in locality working based around children's centres in wards with the highest levels of deprivation and the access to leisure scheme which provides discounted rates for those on low incomes. Postcode analysis of PCT figures on smoking cessation indicate good access to support and people making use of the service from more deprived communities. Initiatives are targeted at improving the health of vulnerable groups such as providing rough sleepers with access to accommodation and health services, and promotion of good health services for adults with learning disabilities. The Council is also promoting access to employment for some disadvantaged groups, such as people with learning difficulties, alongside benefit take-up and debt reduction initiatives. This understanding helps ensure that resources are directed to areas of highest need.
- 91 Promoting healthier communities is one of the council's key objectives and it is leading the partnership's work in a number of areas. In 2006/07, over 4,250 people were part of the Council's Access to Leisure scheme; over 2,800 people took part in a 12-week exercise referral schemes and nearly 400 people lost weight through Healthy Lifestyles Education programmes. The Council is tackling fuel poverty by targeting energy efficiency grant aid and support at vulnerable households living in multiply occupied or privately rented accommodation. It is focused on continuing the reduction in teenage pregnancy and providing good support for young parents and their children.

- 92 The Council works to support the health of its employees. It has introduced initiatives including discounted rates for leisure centre activities, supporting cycling, exercise classes in the civic centre, a working group looking at stress and dignity at work, and good sickness absence and management policies. These measures have contributed to the Council reducing the average number of days lost due to staff sickness in 2006/07 to 9.1 days, compared to 9.89 in 2005/06, and achieving better than average performance (9.32 days) when compared to other councils.
- 93 The Council and the PCT work well to understand health needs and deliver improved outcomes. The Council's research team conducts joint needs assessments on behalf of the Council and the PCT. The Council's resident's panel is also used to provide information about health issues. Recent issues for investigation and action have included reducing smoking (3,500 people successfully engaged in smoking cessation courses from 2003 to 2007) and promoting exercise. This information has been used to develop initiatives that are lowering the incidence of coronary heart disease (deaths from coronary heart disease halved from 160 per 100,000 in 1993 to under 80 in 2005) and producing below average obesity rates contributing to higher than average life expectancy.

Older people

- 94 The Council and its partners take a strategic approach to meeting the needs of older people. *'Meeting the needs of our ageing population'* is a council priority and the Poole Partnership includes *'Valuing our Older People'* among its seven most important issues. The older people steering group is a multi-agency theme group of the partnership. It includes the councillor with special responsibility for 'championing' the needs of older people, the Strategic Director for Adult Social Care and representatives from the independent care sector, the PCT, acute and mental health trusts, police, fire service, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the faith and voluntary sectors. The steering group supervised the production of the older people strategy *'The Time of our Lives'*. These structures demonstrate that the Council and its partners are committed to a coordinated approach to meeting the needs of older people.
- 95 The Council and its partners have a good understanding of the needs of the majority of older people. The older people's strategy was informed by extensive consultation. This included inviting the views of groups such as Age Concern, Brandon Care and the University of the Third Age (U3A), a network of 500 older people, monthly meetings of older people's representatives attended by the Council's older people's champion and 'speak out' events focussing on the needs of older people. The Council also supports service specific consultation such as a large postal survey about learning opportunities for older people which received almost 700 replies and a focus group to obtain information about services to help people remain independent in their own homes. Engagement with older people in some 'hard-to-reach' categories such as BME, gay and some faith communities is less well developed but the Council is tackling this through the *Cosmopolitan* network and its chaplaincy service. This extensive engagement is helping the Council to focus on key issues of concern to older people.

- 96 Adult social care provision is good. The Council, Bournemouth Borough Council and the PCT have a joint Director of Public Health who helps secure cohesive services irrespective of administrative borders. Arrangements for post operative care are good with care packages tailored to individual needs to enable older people to leave hospital promptly after treatment. A wide range of joint commissioning arrangements and other joint initiatives are in place. These include a floating support service for people with dementia and learning disability social work professionals working alongside a disability service health facilitator. These arrangements make it easy for older people to access health and social care services.
- 97 The Council and its partners deliver a comprehensive range of services for older people beyond social care. These include the 'Active Health Link' initiative which encourages people over the age of 60 to follow an active lifestyle, adult learning opportunities in subjects including mathematics, financial literacy and information technology, and intergenerational activities to enable young people to learn from the war-time experiences of older people. The Council supports home fire risk assessments by the fire and rescue service and the multi-agency distraction burglary task force helping vulnerable people to feel safe in their own homes. The Council is also working with the voluntary sector, Benefits Agency and DWP to encourage older people to claim all benefits to which they are entitled. This contributed to older people claiming an additional £2 million in benefits in 2006/07.
- 98 The Partnerships for Older People Project (POPP) is valued by older people. It currently focuses on the areas of Parkstone and Old Town which were selected because of the relatively high level of hospital admissions. Neighbourhood steering groups consisting of older people have chosen to use funding to develop new well-being services and to supplement existing podiatry, hearing, mental health and eye care services. They have also been involved in staff appointments and tender evaluations and have helped professional staff develop care packages for people leaving hospital. These arrangements have been so successful that the PCT has adopted them across the Borough and allocated an additional £640,000 to intermediate care.

Children and young people

- 99 Children and young people living in Poole are healthy and feel safe. Educational outcomes are consistently good and performance in many activities is above the national average for similar authorities. However the gap between the best and worst performing schools remains wide, reflecting the inequalities of the Borough. Overall, services for children and young people with learning disabilities and/or disabilities are good. However, support to young people to help them in the transition to adult services is adequate and for some young people with the most complex conditions and those needing high levels of support there is insufficient post-16 education and employment opportunities. Looked after children and care leavers achieve at a higher level than those in similar boroughs. A high proportion of young people, including young offenders, continue their education or training beyond 16 years of age.

- 100** Service management is good and corporate support exists for further improvements to children's services. The Council and its partners share common objectives and are committed to improving the well being of all children and young people. Priorities are clearly set out in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and link to the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and corporate objectives. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is very well established and promotes enhanced partnership working to improve outcomes. The Council has strong focus and shared strategy on strengthening preventative services and promoting sustainable improvements across all children's services. Service provision reflects and meets the diverse needs of children and young people from BME communities.
- 101** The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Effective joint planning, early intervention and a clear focus on targeting areas and communities where there is greatest need have proved effective. Children and young people are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and are benefiting from the healthy schools programme and increased participation in physical activity. Substance misuse admissions to hospitals continue to be high and relate mainly to alcohol misuse. However the multi-agency strategy is proving effective with a decrease in hospital admissions. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are performing well and provide very good support for both universal and targeted services resulting in good outcomes for children services. The health needs of most children and young people with learning disabilities and/or disabilities are responded to promptly and effectively. However, paediatric occupational therapy, physiotherapy and specialist equipment services are insufficient. Health care provision for looked after children is very good and of high quality.
- 102** Children and young people appear safe and arrangements to ensure this are good. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (joint with Bournemouth) has made a good start in identifying and addressing priorities. It reflects good collaborative relationships with partners and a commitment to incorporate learning into practice. Addressing anti-bullying and domestic violence are key priorities for all agencies. The CAF is used widely across agencies and has clear thresholds for child protection services. An increase in the range of preventative services has reduced the number of children and young people needing public care. For those that do residential units or foster homes within Poole are insufficient to meet individual need. Stability and security in longer-term placements is improving but has yet to be achieved consistently.

- 103** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. Levels of achievement of looked after children, young carers, children and young people from BME communities and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. Outcomes for children at Foundation Stage and at Key Stages 1 and 3 are good with standards above the national average. Children at Key Stage 2 do not do as well as at other Key Stages and the Council has instigated support programmes to address this. The Council's longer-term plans to change the age of transfer between schools coupled with its 'Schools for the Future' programme are key to addressing this issue. Overall, children and young people have good access to activities they enjoy, including a good range of opportunities for sport and music.
- 104** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people contribute to society is good. Children and young people are engaged in decision-making through the Children and Young People's Shadow Board. Actions to reduce anti-social and offending behaviour are having a positive impact. Offending and re-offending rates continue to fall but the number of preventative interventions provided by the Youth Offending Team remains insufficient.
- 105** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. Partnerships to improve provision for 14-19 year olds are adequate. The Council has demonstrated a pragmatic approach to its 14-19 strategy and preparation for the introduction of specialist diplomas is on track after a slow start. The common on-line prospectus is comprehensive and easy to use. Attainment for most young people beyond the age of 16 is good. The number of young people not engaged in employment, education or training is low and Connexions provide good quality advice and guidance to young people including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However transition arrangements and opportunities post 16 for the small number of young people with the most complex needs are insufficient.
- 106** The Council has good capacity to improve. Councillors and senior managers provide good leadership and are committed to improvement. The Director of Children's Services and the Lead Councillor for children and young people have clearly defined roles that are known and understood by staff. Staff morale, commitment and enthusiasm for delivering good quality services for children and young people are outstanding. Outcomes are good although performance management across children's services varies. Partnership working is excellent but voluntary services are not coordinated systematically and this aspect requires further review and development.

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 Borough of Poole was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 3 to 14 December 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.