

Corporate Assessment Report

June 2008



Corporate Assessment

Leicester City Council

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

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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 Leicester City Council's performance is adequate. The Corporate Assessment in 2002 commended the Council for its community focus and sound financial management. However, performance in some areas was poor and satisfaction levels were low. The Council continues to have a good overall approach to diversity and has built on its strengths in community cohesion and continues to demonstrate a good focus on meeting the needs of its diverse communities. However, progress on addressing the recommendations of the previous assessment has been slow and some areas such as performance management, target setting and strategic planning remain only adequate.
- 6 Following the local government elections in May 2007 the Labour group now has overall control of the Council by a clear majority. This was preceded by a period of political instability with no party having overall control of the Council. Political and community leadership is clear as the new administration has set out explicit and challenging ambitions for Leicester and has widespread support from partners, stakeholders and residents for its three aims based around People, Place and Prosperity. It has set out a 25-year vision for Leicester aimed at becoming the most sustainable city in the UK and is restructuring its key strategic plans around this new focus. The Council is consulting widely with local people and stakeholders to help it develop the detail of its proposals. But at the moment action plans are not consistently in place to ensure partners and stakeholders understand their respective roles and responsibilities in delivering the new strategy.
- 7 The Council has successfully increased its capacity by attracting external funding and moving funds to support priority areas such as education and regeneration. There is now visible and effective political leadership and strengths in partnership working. As a result, business and stakeholder confidence in the Council's ability to effect change is improving.
- 8 Recent managerial changes are challenging the Council's capacity at a senior level. An interim Chief Executive and acting Directors of Children's Services and Adults and Housing are in place but this has squeezed capacity in the short term at a very challenging time for the Council. There are other issues around capacity such as high sickness levels which are impacting upon service delivery in front line services. A tendency towards departmentalism and lack of corporate working causes duplication of effort and inefficiencies in practice. There is a need to strengthen the Council's approach to ethical governance and the challenge provided by the Scrutiny function needs to be more effective. The workforce at senior levels is not currently representative of the diverse population and the Council lacks a clear workforce development plan to ensure the right people, skills, knowledge and expertise is in place to enable the Council to achieve its ambitious plans for Leicester.

- 9 Management of performance within departments is effective but there are gaps in the Council's approach to strategic planning and corporate performance management. Current service plans are inconsistent and do not support continuous improvement in services or demonstrate a focus on improving value for money. Most staff have regular appraisals but there is no clear link between the corporate plan, service plans and individual responsibilities. There is an inconsistent approach to identifying and tackling underperformance and some targets are not challenging. The Council recognises that it needs to strengthen corporate management of performance to enable it to focus on improving weaker areas.
- 10 There is an adequate focus on value for money and the overall use of resources is assessed as good. Financial management is sound and financial capacity is good but levels of reserves face increasing pressure to support the Council's capital requirements. Although the Council has met its efficiency targets set out by central government there is scope for a more rigorous approach to identifying and controlling costs and comparing service performance and cost with other councils.
- 11 Service performance is good overall but year on year improvement in performance indicators in 2006/07 has been below the average of other councils. Standards of achievement for children at key stages 3 and 4 are poor but improving and, although numbers of young people 'not in education, employment or training' are reducing, they remain comparatively high.
- 12 The Council and its partners are beginning to secure outcomes in some priority areas. Waste, recycling and planning performance have improved and the Council is making good progress towards meeting the Government's Decent Homes standard. Road safety is improving and there have been some good transport initiatives which have helped reduce traffic and CO2 emissions in the City. Crime rates are falling but still above average and there has been little impact of the Council's and partners' activities on reducing health inequalities in Leicester. Performance is variable in adult social care and there is little clear focus on meeting the needs of the over 50s. Outcomes for children in Leicester are adequate. Arrangements for safeguarding children and young people and services for looked after children are good.

Areas for improvement

- 13 The Council should ensure that its 25-year vision for Leicester is sustainable in the longer term by strengthening partnerships and developing a more dynamic relationship with the private and business sector in particular. The Council should take steps to ensure that it is developing greater capacity through partnerships and strengthen its approach to joint commissioning. Managerial capacity needs to be strengthened urgently to free up the corporate management team so they can concentrate on strategic priorities. The Council needs to develop a more corporate approach to workforce planning to ensure that it is able to recruit, retain and develop talented staff to meet future challenges and deliver the ambitious plans for Leicester.
- 14 Leicester should demonstrate more effective leadership around the Equalities and Diversity agenda by developing a more strategic and focused approach to addressing imbalances in the workforce such as a lack of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), women and disabled staff at senior levels. Setting high standards for disability access and taking a lead role in delivering outcomes for diverse groups will demonstrate greater leadership.
- 15 The Council should strengthen performance management so that councillors can take a more robust and transparent overview of performance against aims and priorities and assess the impact of the Council's activities. The current focus around CPA indicators is not helpful and has resulted in patchy service performance in those areas which have little influence over CPA ratings. Financial and performance management should be linked, there should be a greater focus on setting challenging targets and the Council needs to improve the timeliness and clarity of its performance reporting. Less departmentalism and more collaboration across departments would strengthen performance further.
- 16 The Council should strengthen the transparency and accountability of decision making. The role of the Standards Committee, Monitoring Officer and Leader in setting and maintaining the highest standards of ethical governance should be clarified and a more proactive approach taken to training and developing councillors and staff in modern corporate governance. The Council should consider whether some training such as on the Council's Code of Conduct should be mandatory. Some practices such as Cabinet members also being members of regulatory committees should be discontinued immediately. Such measures will help to reinforce the Council's standing in the community and demonstrate effective and confident community leadership.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	2
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2
	Performance management	2
What has been achieved?	Achievement	2
Overall corporate assessment score**		2
*Key to scores		
1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance		
2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance		
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well		
4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly		

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

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

Context

The locality

- 17 Leicester is the largest city in the East Midlands region of England with a population of 288,000. It is a diverse city. According to the 2001 Census 36.2 per cent of the population are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities and English is not the first language for almost half of the pupils in Leicester primary schools. Out of 388 councils in England, Leicester is the 20th most deprived.
- 18 The Council's population is expected to increase significantly by 2010 although the Council believes its present population is some 20,000 in excess of ONS estimates and will increase faster than predicted due to high levels of inward migration. There are more young people (aged 0 to 15) than either regional or national averages making up over 20 per cent of the population. There is a significantly lower than average percentage of older people (males aged over 65 and females aged over 60) than regional and national averages (14.4 per cent compared with 18.6 per cent nationally).
- 19 Educational attainment is below average and there is a higher than average percentage of the working population with no qualifications. The unemployment rate at 8.2 per cent is higher than regional and national averages at 5.3 and 5.5 per cent respectively. Manufacturing accounts for around a fifth of all employment. Migrant workers form a higher than average percentage of the workforce at 4.3 per cent compared with a national average of 2 per cent.
- 20 Housing is a key issue for Leicester. There is a shortage of affordable housing, particularly larger family homes. Demand for council housing exceeds supply. Only one in five households on the housing register gained a tenancy during the 2006/07 year.
- 21 There are significant health inequalities in Leicester. Life expectancy is lower than national averages, and for men varies by five years across the city. Infant and perinatal mortality rates are higher than regional and national averages and a higher number of babies are born with low or very low birth weights. However, the number of women breastfeeding is increasing and the number of women smoking during pregnancy is decreasing. Teenage pregnancies are higher than average.
- 22 Crime rates in Leicester are above average. Violent crime and racially motivated crimes are significantly higher than similar areas. Most types of crime are falling except for wounding and vehicle interference when compared against the baseline of 2003/04.

The Council

- 23** Following a period of coalition cabinets and minority administrations the Council now has a large Labour majority. The elections in May 2007 returned 38 Labour councillors and eight Conservative, six Liberal Democrats and two Green councillors. Twenty five new councillors were elected. 31.48 per cent of current councillors are from BME communities, an increase of around 10 per cent.
- 24** The Council has adopted a Cabinet and Leader model of governance. Cabinet is made up of ten Councillors and is made up of the following positions and portfolios:
- Leader - Strategy, Finance, Property and Communications;
 - Deputy Leader - Front line service improvement and Neighbourhoods;
 - Culture and Leisure;
 - Regeneration and Transport;
 - Children and Schools;
 - Adults and Older People;
 - Environment and Sustainability;
 - Community Safety and Housing;
 - Community Cohesion; and
 - Health and Wellbeing
- 25** Scrutiny is arranged into three cross party committees; Overview and Scrutiny Management Board; Performance and Value for Money Select Committee; and Health Scrutiny. These Committees are chaired by members of opposition groups. The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Board is supported by several task groups. The Council also has regulatory committees such as the Standards Committee, Planning and Development Control and Licensing. Committees are politically balanced.
- 26** Managerial leadership is provided by a Chief Executive and four corporate directors who are responsible for; Resources; Children and Young People's Services; Adults and Housing; and Regeneration and Culture. They are supported by the Director of Partnerships, Performance and Policy and the Chief Financial Officer who are also members of the corporate management team (the Corporate Directors Board). Service directors manage a range of service areas. The Council employs around 15,000 staff from a wide range of professions including casual and temporary staff. The posts of Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Adults and Housing are currently vacant and interim arrangements have been made to cover these posts from internal appointments.
- 27** The gross revenue budget for 2007/08 is £800 million including schools. The net budget requirement is £240 million. The capital programme for 2007/08 is £121.6 million. The Council tax for a Band D property is £1061.21 in 2007/08 which is lower than regional and national averages.

- 28** The Council's current Corporate Plan for 2006 - 2008 set out the Council's vision as 'To make Leicester more attractive for our diverse communities to live, work and invest in'. This was supported by two strategic objectives:
- to raise educational standards and skills irreversibly so all schools are good schools and individuals are committed to learning throughout life; and
 - to improve our environment to make local neighbourhoods and the city centre places for people to be proud of.
- 29** Leicester City Council works with a range of partnerships. The Leicester Partnership is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for the City. Delivery of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) is through four main boards and overseen by the LSP Executive Board. The Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership Board, Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board, Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board and the Leicester Economic Action Partnership Board co-ordinate and oversee the strategic delivery of projects across the City.
- 30** With LSP partners the new administration has developed a new 25-year vision for the city which will form the basis of a new Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS). The overarching aim of the 25-year vision is for Leicester to become the UK's most sustainable city and there are three key themes: People, Place and Prosperity. The aims and objectives of the SCS are shaping a new Corporate Plan for the Council.
- 31** Leicester City Council received a 'three-star' rating from the Audit Commission in February 2007. Most services were assessed as performing well apart from Culture which was assessed as performing strongly. Housing Benefits was assessed as performing adequately. The Audit Commission's Use of Resources assessment rated the Council as performing well overall. Internal controls and value for money were rated as adequate.

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

Ambition

- 32 The Council is performing well in this area. The Council and partners have recently set out a clear and challenging vision of Leicester as the UK's most sustainable city and identified three overarching priorities of People, Place and Prosperity. These ambitions, which are similar to those of the previous administration, are supported by stakeholders, partners and residents who welcome the greater clarity of purpose. The Council is restructuring its corporate strategies around this new focus to enable it to prioritise resources to achieve its ambition. Politicians are taking some difficult decisions to retain this focus. Consultation has been widespread and effective and the Council is now undertaking community engagement events to involve stakeholders and residents in developing these ambitions further. The Council has in the past been less effective in feeding back to stakeholders and residents the outcomes of its consultation and focuses on area-based approaches rather than engaging with communities of interest. This is important in Leicester because some communities are not based in one geographical area and their needs are not necessarily area-based. The Council recognises that it needs to develop clear milestones for the 25-year plan in consultation with partners, stakeholders and residents and communicate these effectively.
- 33 The Council has developed clear and challenging ambitions aimed at making Leicester the UK's most sustainable city in 25 years. It has grouped its ambitions around the three themes of; Great People, a New Prosperity; and a Beautiful Place. For example, it has set ambitions around reducing traffic, pollution and noise and reducing the environmental impact of the city. It has set challenging ambitions for housing and education. These new themes replace the two strategic priorities of the previous administration of raising educational standards and improving the environment, but the changes represent a new focus and fine tuning rather than radical change to priorities. The new plans have created a greater sense of challenge and revived optimism among stakeholders and more clarity of purpose which has been universally welcomed. A new Sustainable Communities Strategy is out for consultation and the Council is revising its Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy to align them with the new focus. This means the Council is putting in place a sound planning framework for the future.

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- 34** The Council's ambitions are challenging, particularly for improving educational attainment. For example it has an ambitious plan aimed at tackling poor educational achievement in Leicester schools. The Council has set challenging aims around regeneration and environmental sustainability such as increasing recycling and composting rates to 40 per cent by 2008 which is well above the statutory target of 30 per cent. The second Local Transport Plan sets out aims which promote economic and social wellbeing as well as promoting environmental sustainability. Clear and challenging aims help the Council and its partners focus on what matters most in making a real difference to local people's lives.
- 35** Ambitions are based on a sound understanding of the local context and the social, economic and environmental challenges of the area. The Council and its partners have reviewed achievements in the light of regional and national priorities and amended plans as a result. For example the second Local Transport Plan reflects on previous achievements and sets new challenging targets. For example, it has set out to increase bus travel by 40 per cent by 2011. The Housing Strategy is based on sound intelligence and demonstrates a good understanding of the diverse needs of the local community. Good self awareness helps the Council and its partners to adopt a flexible and responsive approach to meeting the needs of the area.
- 36** Engagement with local communities and partners has been good. Children and young people participate and engage with service development and delivery. For example 600 young people (almost half of whom were from BME groups) informed the development of the Play Strategy and 1,470 parents and carers were consulted on the Parenting Strategy with changes being made as a result of their input. Looked after children are influencing decision making through the Stand Up Speak Out group. The Council and partners have ensured the LSP reflects the diversity of the City with twenty community representatives. Work is currently underway to develop the key priorities for the new 25-year vision through engagement workshops with key practitioners, the voluntary and community sector and residents. Regular and focused consultation has thus helped to build consensus and commitment to the vision and ambitions for the area.
- 37** The Council has been less consistent in feeding back to communities the results of its consultation and the subsequent decisions that have been taken. New ward based community meetings should provide an opportunity for an improved two-way dialogue between the Council and residents.

- 38** The new administration is providing robust community leadership to address local challenges and stakeholders and partners recognise this leadership. Difficult decisions have been made, such as introducing a more robust approach to commissioning of the voluntary sector. There is an improving culture of trust and open-ness between the Council and its partners. It has developed successful partnerships around regeneration which are now beginning to bear fruit, such as the Shires retail development, Waterside mixed use development and Curve (new performing arts centre). The Council is developing much stronger relationships with the County Council and other sub regional partners. This enables it to achieve greater change in some areas such as transport and economic development. Effective community leadership enables the Council to tackle difficult issues and respond to competing demands.
- 39** There is strong support from the business sector for the aspirations set out in the new 25-year strategy for Leicester. This is tempered by concerns around the potential for political changes to destabilise long term plans. Private sector partners have not been effectively engaged in the past. They are now optimistic of the scope of the new administration to effect change but feel the Council needs to demonstrate a better understanding of the role of the private sector. The Council does not always project a confident and strong image and acknowledges the need to develop better branding around key projects such as the regeneration of the city centre. The new strategy is enabling stakeholders and residents to have greater confidence in the Council's ability to deliver.

Prioritisation

- 40** The Council is performing adequately in this area. The Council has a good understanding of local needs and takes these into account in setting its priorities. The Council is beginning to align its resources to meet the more focused priorities set by the new administration and increased investment in key areas is beginning to have an impact. Priorities are supported by partners, stakeholders and the voluntary sector and the Council is working effectively with partners to develop ownership and commitment to detailed delivery plans. This will help to ensure the sustainability of the plans. There is a good balance between the immediate needs of the City and a longer term strategic focus. However, there are gaps in the strategic planning framework; current service plans are inadequate although improving. Middle managers and front line staff are not effectively engaged in developing priorities.

- 41 The Council's 25-year vision and its statement of intent to make education its priority for the short and medium term shows a good balance between the long term vision and the immediate needs of the city. Linking educational attainment and the development of vocational training packages to the economic growth plans of the city in partnership with the Learning and Skills Council and other education partners is an example of improved strategic approaches to priorities. Other priorities such as housing are better managed with the Council using its large asset portfolio and land ownership to take advantage of government housing initiatives in areas such as Ashton Green to deliver affordable and social housing. Focusing on key priorities will improve the Council's ability to make an impact and deliver improved outcomes for local people.
- 42 The Council has clear priorities for improving educational attainment in Leicester which are focused around inclusion, access and admissions and school improvement. The Children and Young People's Plan sets out key priorities for improving children's health and making them safer. For example, by reducing smoking and alcohol abuse among young people and protecting them from domestic violence, crime and bullying. These priorities are clearly linked to the government's Every Child Matters agenda and provide a focus for achieving better outcomes for children and young people. Children and young people are prioritised through the Local Area Agreement, recognising there is substantial deprivation in Leicester and children's outcomes vary considerably across the City. There is thus a strong focus on improving those national floor targets where Leicester performs comparatively poorly.
- 43 The Council and its economic partners have set out clear priorities for economic regeneration. These are based on a sound understanding of needs which reflect community strategy aims around increasing prosperity as well as taking account of regional policy frameworks. These linkages will increase effectiveness and impact. The Council and its partners are beginning to prioritise health improvement but this is at an early stage. A new partnership approach has been established to focus on reducing health inequalities and tackling Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), cancer, smoking cessation, infant mortality and seasonal deaths. These priorities reflect local issues.
- 44 The Council's draft financial strategy for 2008/09 to 2010/11 is clearly linked to the new 25-year vision and has four key priority areas. These are; Great People; New Prosperity, and; Beautiful Place with a fourth aim, specific to the financial strategy, around Quality Services. The draft strategy contains key financial priorities for each of the priorities and commitments for budget growth. For example the 'Beautiful Place' priority is backed by budget growth items for; city wardens, street cleaning, graffiti removal, pest control and Leicester in Bloom. Clear links between corporate and financial plans helping the Council to deliver priorities more effectively.

- 45 There are some weaknesses in the Council's plans to deliver the priorities. Strategies are based on sound analysis but not always linked to robust action plans. Roles and responsibilities of partners are often not clearly defined and review mechanisms are unclear. Current service plans are variable in quality, do not follow a consistent, corporate framework and many have not been updated. Although service plans have enabled the Council to deliver adequate or better services across the board, most do not have a clear focus on value for money and target setting is inconsistent. However, the draft service plans for 2008/09 are an improvement on previous versions. A lack of robust plans impairs the Council's ability to deliver its priorities effectively.
- 46 The Council has agreed targets for its priorities but these are not always outcome focused. Some targets are not challenging. For example, some targets have been set below the performance of the previous year or are based on completing a process rather than achieving an outcome. This means the Council cannot consistently demonstrate to local people, partners and stakeholders the impact of its activities.
- 47 The Council has begun to more effectively review and reallocate resources available to partner organisations to address the priorities. The Council has introduced a new commissioning strategy to ensure that financial resources are used to support ambitions and priorities. These new arrangements have yet to be fully supported by the voluntary sector who are concerned about placing elements of the voluntary and community sector into unwanted competition with each other for resources. However, this approach enables the Council to be more flexible and responsive to changing user expectations in the longer term.
- 48 The Council prioritises meeting the needs of diverse communities. It has been recognised nationally for its approach to community cohesion and for its work with refugees and asylum seekers. There are many good examples of services responding to needs. For example by recruiting Somali housing advisers and involving tenants in the design of replacement kitchens. Opening hours in customer service centres have been extended and foster carers have support to enable them to care for the hair and skin care needs of looked after children and young people of African origin. There is an influential Council of Faiths and the Council is a pilot for the Mainstreaming Moderation programme which focuses on mapping, reaching out and engaging with the Muslim community to develop resilience to extremist messages and approaches. These activities help to ensure the needs and preferences of different groups are considered when planning services.
- 49 The Council has been able to make a difference for local people by prioritising the most deprived areas. For example, it focused attention on the St Matthews estate, setting up a neighbourhood management board and undertaking work to support tenants and tackle anti-social behaviour. As a result, such areas are now seen by residents as good places to live.

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- 50** The Council has improved its focus on key priorities rather than allowing itself to be distracted by operational issues. It is beginning to become more proactive rather than reactive, for example it has begun to play a more active part in sub-regional issues. It is now engaging with partners outside the City to develop proposals for a multi-area agreement focusing on economic regeneration. It has also recognised the need for a wider partnership approach to solve traffic congestion problems through park and ride schemes. A sustained focus ensures the Council achieves a greater impact on its priorities.

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

Capacity

- 51 The Council is performing adequately in this area. The Council has strong and visible political leadership with councillors providing clear direction on priorities. Decision making arrangements are working well and cabinet members take responsibility for strategy and policy. Risk management and value for money are adequate. The Council's finances are robust and its approach to procurement is realising some efficiency savings. The Council has a good approach to asset management but needs to manage its property more strategically. Overview and scrutiny, while improving, is not sufficiently challenging and has yet to demonstrate impact on improving outcomes for local people. The Council's application of ethical framework and standards needs improvement. Workforce and succession management is effective but senior management capacity is currently constrained. There are considerable challenges to capacity, not least the challenging ambitions set by the new administration and the need to strengthen corporate capacity and make key senior appointments.
- 52 Political leadership is visible, widely respected and appropriately strong. Councillors are providing a clear lead to staff and partners on the Council's priorities. Councillor champions are in place and providing a political lead on key issues such as; front line service improvement and neighbourhoods; environment and sustainability; community cohesion; and health and wellbeing. Each councillor champion leads on a key priority area giving these a high profile and providing leadership.
- 53 Decision making arrangements are working well. The roles and responsibilities of councillors in taking decisions are clear. Senior officers are clear on their responsibilities and decisions are made with a business-like approach. Relationships between officers and councillors are good but could be strengthened, particularly at senior levels. There are processes in place to assist cabinet leads to manage the performance of their portfolios and key projects such as weekly meetings and Cabinet Briefings. These mechanisms aid effective decision making and support improvement in service delivery.

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- 54** The Council's application of the ethical governance framework and standards is unsatisfactory. The promotion, application and monitoring of standards has a low profile. The Council has a significant number of new councillors who have been offered standards training and drop in 'surgeries'. However code of conduct training is not compulsory and few councillors have attended. The Standards Committee and monitoring officer provide some training, advice and assistance to councillors on the ethical framework but this is not a proactive approach. The Standards Committee has an independent chair, with two additional independent lay people making up half of the committee. However, the remaining three members are the leaders of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat groups, and deputy leader of the controlling Labour group. As these are all high profile councillors and therefore more likely to be the subject of complaints, this move is inadvisable and could expose the Council to risk and challenge to the credibility of the Committee.
- 55** Overview and Scrutiny is in place and improving. Recent elections have resulted in a high number of new and inexperienced Scrutiny councillors and there is still a large training and learning issue faced by the Council to equip these with the required skills to challenge effectively. Cabinet members do not routinely present themselves to scrutiny for challenge and scrutiny is not effectively challenging service performance. Past scrutiny task groups have reviewed specific service areas such as the operational transport service and night-time economy and the newly developed task groups set up since May 2007 are beginning to add challenge and drive agendas. However, until recently the overall impact on services delivered to the community has been limited. Scrutiny is still not properly challenging Cabinet decisions and has yet to demonstrate an impact on improving outcomes for local people.
- 56** Financial planning is robust. The Council's draft medium term financial strategy has clear aims to support the Council's priorities. The Council has moved funds to support priority areas such as £2.5million for social care services and £0.5 million in initiatives to combat crime and disorder in the city. Reserves are adequate but coming under increasing pressure to support the Council's capital requirements. Financial planning could be improved further through clearer linkages between financial and service plans. The existing strategy is not clearly linked to other key Council strategies such as the HR strategy and Asset management Plan to show how these affect future planning. The draft financial strategy for 2008/09 to 2010/11 is clearly linked to the Council's new '25-year' vision and the key priority areas. By clearly linking strategies and service plans the Council can assure it has the resources in place to deliver its priorities.
- 57** The Council's approach to securing value for money is adequate. Current service plans do not have a clear and sustained focus on securing improved value for money. There is recognition of the need to achieve value for money and efficiency savings in some departmental strategies however this approach is not consistent or comprehensive and there are no explicit efficiency targets. The new draft Finance Strategy requires departmental strategies to contain an efficiency plan with the benefit of national comparative spending information. Clear efficiency targets at departmental level help councils to improve value for money.

- 58 The Council is delivering adequate value for money in its services. Comparative service costs are higher than average overall reflecting higher than average levels of need and local demands on services. The Council has an ongoing overall efficiency target of £7 million per year which it achieved in 2006/07 and it is on track to achieve its overall target of £21 million by 2008/09.
- 59 The Council has been effective in increasing financial capacity through government grants and community support packages such as Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF). It has secured £65 million funding for economic regeneration programmes across the city. This has helped to provide premises for new and growing businesses such as the Leicester Creative Business Depot which provides studio accommodation and access to business advice for creative industries.
- 60 There is scope to build further capacity within the community and voluntary sector to enable them to access external funding and help deliver priorities. There is some unrest amongst the sector about the allocation of resources and the transparency of funding decisions. Similarly, the Council has not fully harnessed the skills, intelligence and leadership capacity of the private sector to sustain its activities and partnerships around economic regeneration. This means the Council may not be making full use of existing capacity to achieve change and deliver its ambitious priorities.
- 61 Departmental workforce and succession management is effective. The Council invests in improving its staff and management capacity. Managers have undergone a competency profile assessment and training programme. Identified needs such as project management skills have been addressed by implementing a PRINCE2 training programme. A new Council wide learning and development service has been set up and is now delivering basic training programmes for all staff but this requires further development. Succession planning takes place mostly at a departmental level and there is currently a lack of a corporate approach to identifying the capacity, skills and workforce required to deliver the Council's ambitions. Without adequate strategic capacity, achievement of the Council's priorities is at risk
- 62 Senior management capacity is currently uncertain. Steps have been taken to address the issue including the departure of the Chief Executive and the Corporate Director of Adults and Housing. As a short term measure, the Council's Chief Executive post is filled by the Director of Children and Young People's Service and there is an acting Director of Children's Services and acting Director of Adults and Housing. Within both services there are areas of underperformance and significant challenges for the Council. There is limited capacity at the corporate centre which is impacting upon the Council's ability to be fully effective.

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- 63 Risk management is adequate and improving and now informs strategic plans. The Council has a systematic approach to identifying and managing risk and has developed a corporate Risk Management Strategy, which sets out the framework for the identification, classification and management of risks. Partners have seen the Council as extremely risk averse and this has stifled progress in the past. For example, the digital media centre now under construction was delayed almost to the point of losing the external funding because of concerns about risk. However, key risks faced by the Council have now been identified and departments are compiling and implementing risk mitigation plans for all of these. A more proactive approach to risk management would enable the Council to minimise risks while encouraging innovation.
- 64 The Council is engaging actively with partners to commission jointly and pool budgets to maximise benefit and increase service efficiency. For example, the Council has jointly commissioned with the PCT the delivery of the Healthy Schools programme, and with the Police to provide community wardens. There is a joint Director of Strategic Commissioning for Children's Services shared with the PCT. There is scope for further joint commissioning which would improve the efficiency of service delivery in other areas and reduce duplication.
- 65 Partnership working is improving and beginning to add value through information sharing and some pooling of resources. The LSP has become more effective since the establishment of the Executive. Relationships between the City and County Council have improved significantly and there are examples of joint working such as developing a park and ride scheme to ease traffic congestion and the proposed Multi Area Agreement (MAA) on economic development.
- 66 The Council is not using ICT to its fullest effect to support service delivery and help it deliver its priorities. The Council's previously devolved ICT service resulted in several systems needing updating and a lack of consistent security arrangements among the various departmental systems. The Council has now introduced a corporate approach and is supporting the development of integrated systems. In its revenue budget for 2008/09 the Council has committed £1million for improvements to customer access. Improvements to the telephone system and web access are planned which are aimed at improving access to the Council and its services for local people.
- 67 The Council's approach to purchasing is realising some efficiency savings. The Council uses the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) to benefit from its large-scale purchasing powers and is a long standing member of ESPO. In addition, a contract for the recruitment of temporary staff introduced in April 2007 has reduced the number of manually prepared invoices from 25,000 to only 26 freeing up officer time and saving around £1 million. A recent Public Interest Report published in December 2007 made criticisms against the Council's procurement activities in the housing department going back over a number of years. The Council responded positively to the report and made changes prior to the report being published. There is, however, scope to develop a more strategic approach to procurement. Opportunities for shared service delivery and joint commissioning of services have not yet been fully exploited.

- 68** The Council has a positive approach to diversity and community cohesion which is evident in its policy development and service delivery. It is currently at level 3 of the local government Equality Standard. Seventy six per cent of councils have not yet achieved this level. However, the workforce is not fully representative of the community it serves with comparatively few women, BME or disabled people, particularly at senior management levels. The Council recognises the benefits of a diverse workforce and has undertaken initiatives aimed at increasing the numbers of BME staff employed. However it has not taken a sufficiently strategic approach to champion and promote challenging targets and set a strong example for other public and private sector partners in Leicester.

Performance management

- 69** The Council is performing adequately in this area. It has managed performance effectively at a service level for a long period with most services being classed as better than adequate. However, it has yet to develop a fully effective performance management culture. Poor performance is monitored and addressed but there is no corporate approach to performance management and departments adopt their own arrangements. Project management has improved and major projects are managed effectively. Performance management of partnerships is in place but this is not fully embedded. Staff appraisal coverage is good but quality is inconsistent and links between operational targets and outcomes are not always clear. Action planning and target setting is not consistently strong across all services.
- 70** The Council does not have a fully effective performance management culture. The Council has established a comprehensive framework which it sees as the vehicle to enable the Council to implement its aim of 'investing in continuous improvement in a well-managed organisation'. However, there are gaps in linkages between community, corporate and service plans to individual plans and priorities. Staff personal targets do not consistently reflect or link to the Council's corporate priorities. Therefore staff, partners and contractors' views of priorities may not align fully with those of the Council and they may not have a clear understanding of how their own performance contributes to the overall delivery of corporate and community priorities.
- 71** Individual departments have adopted their own successful reporting arrangements but there is a lack of a corporate approach to performance management that is systematic and consistently applied. Departments regularly monitor performance using department specific systems and approaches. The Council's corporate system is not being used to its full capability. As a result officers and councillors are not assisted in managing performance through access to accurate and up to date information.

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- 72** Performance management is addressing some areas of poor performance. Systematic and frequent monitoring of key performance indicators in housing benefit, council tax and rent collection has enabled the Council to improve its performance in these areas. Systematic monitoring and review of performance within cleansing services has also resulted in some areas of poor performance being addressed. Performance monitoring and subsequent review of spending on bed and breakfast accommodation revealed contributory factors and process inefficiencies which, when rectified, resulted in improved performance and addressed overspending. However, some areas of poor performance have still to be rectified. For example the level of days lost due to sickness absence has remained high even though this has been reviewed.
- 73** Action planning and target setting is not consistently strong across all services. Many plans are not supported by clear and SMART deliverable actions. High-level plans such the BVPP do not have consistently challenging targets. Some BVPI targets, such as sickness absence, have been set which would reduce performance. Some action plans in departmental service plans are incomplete with missing information around milestones, completion dates and outcomes. Without clear targets and SMART action plans consistently in place across all services and plans, the Council cannot demonstrate the effectiveness of its actions.
- 74** Involvement of councillors in challenging and managing performance has improved in the past year. Cabinet members have a good understanding of performance in their portfolio areas and have regular meetings with officers to discuss performance. However, back bench and opposition councillors cannot easily access performance information. Performance reports have improved over the past six months but are still not timely, have many entries showing 'data not available' and contain charts produced in black and white, which are not easy to understand. This prevents councillors from being fully effective in managing and challenging service performance. Improved reporting would enable councillors to understand the impact of service performance at a ward level.
- 75** Performance management of partnerships is improving but inconsistent. Performance management arrangements for partnerships are in place but have yet to fully demonstrate their effectiveness. The LSP has bought a performance management IT system for all partners using NRF funds to manage performance against LAA targets. The Council and its partners in the LSP have a reasonable understanding of performance towards agreed targets. Progress towards the shared targets of the LAA are monitored by the Council through quarterly cabinet reports and by the LSP through regular reports to the Executive and wider partnership. The Executive is held to account for performance but data provided to partners is not timely. Performance is not being effectively scrutinised by the wider Partnership Group to give a more robust and constructive challenge to performance. Performance management is not effectively supporting the delivery of the shared objectives in the community strategy. However, there are good examples of performance management within children's services partnerships such as the outstanding joint Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Board.

- 76** The Council's annual appraisal system does not help staff to understand their role in delivering corporate priorities. The Council is applying a corporate process of staff appraisal, which had a 96 per cent completion rate last year. Development needs are highlighted by this process and enter the corporate training programme for departmental delivery, which has improved since centralisation of the programme. The quality of performance appraisals is however variable and operational targets set for individuals are not consistently linked to outcomes or corporate priorities. Focusing on outcomes helps individuals to understand how their performance impacts on corporate priorities.
- 77** The Council's approach to dealing with customer complaints and feedback lacks coordination and is ineffective as a result. The Council has developed a corporate complaints and comments procedure and there have been some attempts to co-ordinate the approach through a cross-departmental complaints group. However, this is relatively new and the impact of its establishment is unclear. For example, there have been instances where a complainant has received two different letters from two different departments about the same complaint. The Council is not systematically getting feedback from customers to help inform service delivery. Some service areas have used customer questionnaires in the past to seek feedback but the use of these is inconsistent. This lack of user focus prevents the Council from using feedback to improve services in a consistent way.
- 78** The Council has responded positively to external challenge. It responded quickly and robustly to the Public Interest Report published by the Audit Commission in December 2007. Additionally the IDeA has been used as a critical friend and the Council has been responding to the weaknesses identified by them such as in communications and consultation. The Council actively sought out advice and assistance from DCSF on tackling educational underachievement and is working with the Teenage Pregnancy Support Group leading to a significant new drive in this area. The Council is more likely to improve services if it can continue to learn from best practice both within and outside the public sector.

What has been achieved?

- 79 The Council is performing adequately in this area. The Council's priorities take account of national and shared priorities. The previous focus on education and environment is beginning to show an impact and the new administration's clear focus on people, place and prosperity has clarified the Council's ambitions for Leicester. However, inconsistencies in performance management, target setting and an overemphasis on those performance indicators that impact on CPA assessment has resulted in patchy service performance and some residents are not experiencing improved outcomes.
- 80 Leicester City Council received a 'three-star' rating from the Audit Commission in February 2007. Most services were assessed as performing well apart from Culture which was assessed as performing strongly. Housing Benefits was assessed as performing adequately. The 2007 Direction of Travel rated the Council as improving adequately and the Use of Resources assessment rated the Council as performing well overall. An inspection of the Supporting People programme in November 2007 judged the Council to be providing a fair, one-star service with uncertain prospects for improvement. An inspection of Community Safety in February 2005 judged the Council to be providing a fair, one-star service with uncertain prospects for improvement.
- 81 Compared with similar types of council, Leicester's overall rate of improvement is below average. Fifty eight per cent of performance indicators have improved over the last three years compared with the national average of 62 to 64 per cent. In 2006/07 it had 23 per cent of indicators in the top performing 25 per cent compared with the national average of 29 per cent. This means services in Leicester are not improving as fast as other areas and there are fewer high performing services.
- 82 There are improvements in some priority areas. For example, the youth offending service and partners have successfully reduced anti-social behaviour and first time offenders. The Council has made significant recent investment in facilities and infrastructure, some of which is beginning to bear fruit. For example investment in parks and open spaces has resulted in increased use and investment in recycling and waste collection has improved performance against targets. However, resident satisfaction does not reflect this investment and satisfaction rates for waste collection and street cleanliness are below average. There have been some successes in improving transport with more people using buses and fewer people are being killed or seriously injured on Leicester's roads.
- 83 The Council is working to improve access to services by introducing additional customer service centres and increasing call centre capacity. It has plans to improve business efficiency further and provide a more joined up service but currently customers have to use various service points and telephone numbers to access services. Disability access is adequate but there is a focus on meeting the minimum standards required by legislation rather than setting high standards of access.

- 84 The Council's achievements have received positive external recognition. The Council has achieved eight Beacon status awards since the scheme began and works proactively with other councils to share its experience in these areas. One of the most recent Beacon awards was in culture and sport for hard to reach groups. This was in recognition of the Council's work with partners to use sport and culture to make a real difference for the diverse communities and minority groups that live in the city. Because of its Beacon Status for community cohesion the Council has been a member of the Sharing Good Practice group set up by the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2006. The Council is using external recognition to spread good practice to others.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 85 The Council is working effectively with partners to secure improvements in sustainable communities and transport. It has set challenging targets around environmental sustainability, economic regeneration and transport and has some notable successes in this area.
- 86 The Council is working towards developing a more sustainable future for its residents particularly through efforts to revitalise the city centre through retail and mixed use development. It has secured £65 million in external funding towards economic regeneration and a range of high profile projects are now nearing completion. For example, John Lewis will shortly open a new flagship store in the expanded Shires shopping centre and the Curve performing arts centre is due to open in December 2008. Business confidence is now improving as a result. However, the city centre regeneration has caused disruption for businesses and residents and a more dynamic approach to marketing and branding is now needed so local people understand and support the Council's wider ambitions.
- 87 There is scope for the Council to demonstrate stronger leadership in using its planning powers more effectively to demand high standards of access design. For example, a new office building has external wheelchair lifts because the design incorporates steps up to the front of the building. Focusing on minimum standards rather than best practice has resulted in a compromise in this instance. The Council has set high standards for architecture and there are some striking new buildings taking shape. However there is scope to create a stronger and more coherent sense of place through better physical and architectural connections between for example the Business Quarter and the Cultural Quarter.

- 88 The Council is helping develop sustainable communities by supporting local business procurement. The Council has used grants from the Regional Centre of Excellence to help develop small and medium enterprises. Previously local small businesses had few successes in winning contracts with the Council. Through European social fund monies an access to procurement project was set up 18 months ago to help small and medium businesses better engage with other companies and specifically with the public sector. Both projects have helped local businesses win more business from the public sector. However, business sector awareness of these initiatives was limited and business leaders are seeking a more dynamic and proactive approach with the Council using its powers to reduce regulation or create the right conditions for growth.
- 89 The Council and its partners have worked successfully to address post 16 learning and young people are making good progress. The percentage achieving level 2 or 3 qualifications has rapidly improved and is now above similar authorities. Addressing skills gaps is important if the area is to attract inward investment and improve prosperity.
- 90 Leicester has worked effectively with partners in the private, public and third sector to address the housing crisis in imaginative and innovative ways. For example, it provides excellent services for homeless people aiming to ensure that no-one sleeps rough. A new hostel, the Dawn Centre, has been open two years. This provides 42 beds with ensuite facilities and a day centre, full GP practice including podiatry and drugs and alcohol services as well as health screening and mental health services. This has had a profound effect on homelessness. This supports corporate priorities around city centre regeneration as well as housing objectives.
- 91 The Council is working effectively to improve local housing stock and is engaging tenants well in plans for improvements and the day to day management of estates by creating neighbourhood management boards and consulting with tenants. Tenant satisfaction is good and voids are low. The Council is making significant improvements in the condition of local housing stock. Following a vote by tenants the Council has retained its housing stock and is on track to meet the decent homes standard by 2010. It is also on track to meet its LPSA target for achieving decent homes standard in private sector rented stock.
- 92 The supply of housing is insufficient to meet local housing needs. The Council is taking steps to increase affordable housing through some innovative schemes. The Council with its partners has established a not for profit company to purchase properties to rent to people on the Housing Register at sub-market rate. This is helping to meet demands for certain types of properties such as larger family homes. The Council has successfully revived the housing market in some areas such as Braunstone and St Matthews where there was previously a high turnover of properties, high levels of voids and little demand for houses in the area.

- 93 There is a mismatch between supply and demand in meeting local housing needs in Leicester. The Council has not achieved its target for 30 per cent affordable housing for new developments over a certain size, only achieving 15 per cent. For example, new developments in the city centre have focused on high value one and two bed apartments rather than affordable or social housing. There is an unmet need for larger, family homes. There is a conflict between Council objectives around city centre regeneration and aspirations around affordable housing and the Council faces opposition from developers who claim that targets for affordable housing are unviable. The Council has a good understanding of the issues and is active at a regional and national level in seeking innovative solutions to the problem. The Council has taken other steps to revitalise the housing market by tackling high stock turnover and empty properties.
- 94 The Council and its partners have a good track record of effectively addressing local and global environmental issues. The City has a long history of promoting environmental issues and was given the title of Britain's first 'Environment City' in 1990. Since then it has continued to promote environmental issues and successfully achieved EMAS status - a European standard for environmental management.
- 95 The Council is implementing plans to improve the attractiveness and safety of parks and public spaces. For example, improvements to Abbey Park have reduced crime and increased use and a new park has been created in response to feedback from residents on the St Matthews estate. The riverside area performs an important function for both flood protection as well as enhancing bio diversity as the flood plains are largely undeveloped. By improving the local environment the Council is making Leicester a more attractive place to live and work, and encouraging inward investment.
- 96 The Council is working well with partners to deliver sustainable waste management solutions and has successfully increased recycling and composting meeting government targets through an innovative solution in partnership with a private sector company. Recycling is 34 per cent which is higher than the statutory target set by DEFRA. It is diverting 44 per cent of waste away from landfill and it looks well placed to achieve its target of recycling 40 per cent of domestic waste by 2008/09. The Council is also investigating future solutions such as energy from waste to respond to legislative and market changes. These approaches support future environmental sustainability.

- 97 The Council has undertaken a range of actions to reduce its impact on the environment. All diesel vehicles within the Council's fleet now use a five per cent biodiesel blend of Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel (ULSD) which emits less CO₂ and up to 28 per cent less particulate pollution compared to conventional ULSD. The Council also operates an electric pool vehicle. Intelligent metering has been installed in over 300 Council buildings including schools and the Council has achieved a reduction in the amount of water used in its buildings since the 2000/01 base year. The Council has set a target of 75 per cent of planning applications for major developments should comply with its policy requirement that 10 per cent of energy use be provided from renewable sources. The Council has reduced its own CO₂ emissions by 27 per cent since 1990 and is on track to achieve its 50 per cent target by 2025. The Council is showing effective leadership by reducing its own impact on the environment.
- 98 The Council and its partners ensure that transport measures support other objectives such as improving prosperity, health and community safety. There are some good examples of initiatives that have made a real difference to local people. This includes new bus services opening up employment prospects for residents in Braunstone and a scheme for unemployed people which provides half price bus fare for four weeks to enable them to seek work, attend interviews etc. Older people and those with a disability are entitled to half price travel with no time restrictions. Passes can be used for trains, buses, taxis and dial a ride services. These schemes mean people are not excluded through lack of access to transport.
- 99 The Council and its partners have improved access to transport in several ways making it easier for people to get where they need to go. There has been an increase in public transport use and local people are now more satisfied with public transport. The Council and its partners have achieved or are on track to achieve around three quarters of the targets within the first Local Transport Plan. This means more people are accessing bus services, road safety has improved and congestion is easing in some areas.

Safer and stronger communities

- 100 The Council works well with partners to develop community safety priorities and understands the impact of its services on the delivery of community safety priorities. The Council has a good understanding of issues impacting upon community cohesion. Local priorities have been identified by analysing data and by listening to local people including those from BME communities. Local priorities are beginning to be delivered and there is some evaluation of projects and outcomes for the community. However, crime rates remain high.

- 101** The Council is clear in its contribution to building stronger communities, addressing the needs of black and minority ethnic groups and other disadvantaged groups. It is delivering its responsibilities under Race Equality and disability legislation. The creation of a Cabinet Portfolio for Cohesion represents a clear commitment from the administration to respond to the needs of BME groups and others at risk of disadvantage. The Council has begun to allocate new resources to support community based activity to deliver its priorities, like the Asian Women's project, asset transfer projects and Caribbean Carnival. This gives a clear message to officers, partners and stakeholders of the importance placed on this area of the Council's responsibilities.
- 102** The Council has a good understanding of the complexity of issues that its communities present. The Mainstreaming Moderation approach to preventing violent extremism builds on the city's approach to community cohesion, is broad but is also clearly focused. For example, the work of the St Phillips Centre on interfaith dialogue and interagency responses to the needs of Muslim and other faith groups is highly innovative and attracting recognition beyond the city and region. As a result, the Council can have the confidence to further strengthen its approach to partnership working and maintain community cohesion in the city.
- 103** Recent progress on crime reduction is weak. Compared with similar areas the City's average crime rate is worsening, levels are now above average and the City has been unable to match the decreases seen elsewhere. Burglary and vehicle crime rates are relatively stable but similar areas are achieving greater reductions. Violent crime and sexual offences are both above average and showing no significant improvement on the average achieved in similar areas. There are significantly higher than average levels of racially motivated crime. Given the highly diverse population in Leicester, higher levels of this type of crime might be expected but rates fluctuate significantly and show no obvious improvement on the average achieved in similar areas. There is a target in the LAA to increase reporting of racial incidents, racist incident figures are reported regularly by schools, and training on racist incidents, bullying, child protection, health and safety, and on governance issues is being delivered. While increased reporting is a positive indicator of the community's confidence in reporting such incidents, there is scope for a more co-ordinated approach between the Council and its community safety partners.
- 104** The Council and its partners are not addressing fear of crime in a co-ordinated way to reassure the public and keep local people informed. There are a range of projects taking place that will contribute towards helping people feel safer, such as replacing door and window locks for vulnerable people. However, these projects are not well co-ordinated across the Council and partners. This makes it difficult to measure impact and maximise capacity.

- 105** The Council has an effective approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour on its estates which addresses the vulnerability of minority groups. The Supporting Tenants and Residents (STAR) service supports BME tenants to enable them to settle into new communities particularly where housing needs mean that suitable properties are not available in predominantly black or Asian communities. STAR workers ensure the new tenants have all the services they need, that utilities are connected, and introduce the new family to their neighbours fostering links with support networks. Particularly vulnerable people have additional security measures provided such as locks, CCTV and enclosed letterboxes. The Council has worked with groups of parents, undertaken family intervention programmes and developed restorative justice programmes for young offenders. There has been a significant reduction in the number of young people who become first-time offenders. These measures help to ensure vulnerable people do not become victims of antisocial behaviour and support cohesive communities.
- 106** The Council participates effectively in the Drug Action Team (DAT). The Council has a strategy for supporting drug misusers through and after treatment and has a successful criminal justice drugs intervention programme. This has seen an increase in people receiving treatment with more than half of them coming through the criminal justice system. Targeted work through the Drugs Interventions Programme has seen a 56 per cent reduction in reoffending. This means that more drug users have access to treatment and are less likely to commit crimes as a result.
- 107** Although the Council recognises the need to manage the night time economy the Council's ability to respond to alcohol related crime is ineffective. It works closely with the police and partners on issues around licensing for example. It is using its licensing powers to address problem areas of the city while also using licensing positively to develop a more cosmopolitan feel through support for street cafes and licensed premises in the developing cultural quarter. This supports corporate objectives around city centre regeneration. However, the Council does not have a clear approach to tackle alcohol misuse and alcohol related crimes and has not made links to the health issues associated with alcohol. The alcohol strategy is under development. The Council is behind other cities in not having a strategic approach to alcohol.
- 108** The Council has effective partnerships and multi-agency approaches with health, police, highways and fire authorities to reduce accidental death and injury. The Council is making satisfactory progress in reducing road casualties but recent increases give cause for concern. There were 88 incidents of people being killed or seriously injured on the roads in 2006/07, of which 11 were children. This was a slight increase on 2005/06.

- 109** The Council and its partners are investing effectively in improving the safety of children and young people. The Safer Leicester Partnership has funded two victim contact workers to work with young victims of youth crime. The child accident prevention strategy includes child pedestrian training to 300 children per year, and cycling training for children in years five and six, which has led to a 20 per cent increase in cycling at the targeted schools. A 'Warning Zone' facility for year five and six children to learn about aspects of safety including road and fire safety opened in November 2006 and it is anticipated that all schools will attend within three years.
- 110** The Council undertakes good work with partners aimed at preventing accidents in the home. This ranges from slipper exchange schemes and falls prevention work for elderly people, to cycling training and safe routes to school for children and young people. However this work is not effectively co-ordinated across the Council and its partners and not seen as part of the work of the CDRP. Leadership on accident prevention work is less effective as a result.
- 111** The Council has an effective approach to emergency planning and it has good arrangements in place to ensure the Council can respond appropriately to emergency situations, support emergency service partners and communicate with the public. Plans are based on an up to date risk assessment and the Council has identified vulnerable individuals and tailored its plans to meet their needs for example by considering the concerns of some ethnic and faith groups around decontamination procedures. The Council and Local Resilience Forum partners undertake regular testing through table top rehearsals supported by annual real time exercises involving other agencies. Current and well rehearsed plans minimise the disruption arising from emergency situations.

Healthier communities

- 112** Health inequalities are a significant long-term issue for Leicester. For example there are areas where performance is significantly lower than East Midlands and England averages such as perinatal and infant mortality and deaths related to coronary heart disease. Under-18 conception rates remain high and are among the worst performing nationally. There are still large variations in life expectancy particularly in the more deprived wards and among ethnic communities. The Council and its partners have now begun to address these issues and have enhanced their capacity through joint working and commissioning of services. There are some good initiatives and projects but it is too early for many of these to demonstrate a measurable improvement in the health of local people.

- 113 The Council and its partners have recognised the need to improve health and reduce health inequalities. There has been a proactive engagement with the national health inequalities team which has resulted in a comprehensive plan for improvement. The lead councillor for health, appointed in May 2007, is providing effective challenge and leadership across the partnership to drive health improvement. A strategic framework for health inequalities is under development and subject to consultation. A joint strategic director of commissioning has been appointed and there are plans to appoint a joint Director of Public Health. A strong multi agency approach to the development of Children's centres has embedded health in local planning and service delivery.
- 114 The Council and its partners are beginning to take action to understand and meet the diverse health needs of local communities. A comprehensive needs analysis by the Director of Public Health in 2006 is enabling partners to target resources and support to neighbourhoods of greatest need. Local health improvement grants are available and being used by local communities for example to target smoking cessation or increase opportunities for physical activities. Neighbourhood committees and the emerging Community Committees have representation from health. A good understanding of needs means that resources can be focused.
- 115 The Council is taking action to support and increase healthy lifestyles but outcomes are mixed. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well in primary and secondary schools, for example, the school meals service encourages healthy eating. Eighty-four per cent of schools have enrolled on the Healthy Schools Programme and an obesity strategy has been developed. The Council has increased leisure centre use, partly by reducing admission costs, providing good quality childcare and improving transport links although targets for participation are not consistently met. Access to these facilities is free for residents who are over 60. This has helped the Council to increase participation and access by hard to reach groups. The Sustrans 'bike project' increased cycling at eight Leicester schools by 300 per cent and the Council has recently been awarded £800,000 to develop cycleways in City parks.
- 116 Access to health services has been improved in some areas. Health visitors have been reallocated so they better meet the needs of local populations based on levels of deprivation, translation requirements and levels of child protection. Analysis of Asian communities has identified a high prevalence of diabetes and chronic heart disease. In these areas the partnership has supported pharmacists to target smoking cessation and carry out blood pressure and diabetes tests. The engagement of General Practitioners in local management of chronic heart disease for example blood pressure and cholesterol control is improving. Because of these initiatives it is easier for local people to access health services. However, it will be some time before actual improvements in health become apparent.

Older people

- 117** The Council is working with partners to develop a more strategic approach to meeting the needs of older people but currently the focus is mainly on social care. A recent Supporting People inspection judged the Council's services to be fair 'one-star' with 'uncertain prospects for improvement'. Leadership of older people's issues is evident and effective. There are some good examples of activities taking place but currently these are not well co-ordinated at a strategic level. This means that corporate focus on what matters most is not assured and some opportunities to maximise the impact of activities may be missed.
- 118** The Council has several effective consultation processes through which it effectively engages with older people. The Older People's Forum has been active for several years and is a sound reference point for the development of council strategies. The Council and its partners have recognised the needs of the city's diverse cultural and BME communities and have developed a range of consultative processes such as the BME Elders Forum to assess, challenge and improve service delivery. Parts of the voluntary sector also have active involvement in strategy and oversight development through representation on key partnership forums, strategy development groups and through providing services for older people.
- 119** The portfolio-holder for Older People is a positive advocate and active champion for older people and driving change in line with the council's new corporate priorities. His cross-service work within the Council is at an early stage and there is recognition that this should be strengthened. The portfolio-holder has developed good contacts and relationships with local people and is an active presence on the main strategic and consultative frameworks.
- 120** There has been an inconsistent approach to service planning and targets have not been focused on achieving outcomes. The Older People's Strategy is new while the analysis of achievement from the old strategy, which ceased in 2007, is inconsistent. Officer leadership lies currently with the Director of Adults and Housing but there have been several different people in this post over recent years. The joint commissioning strategy with the PCT focuses primarily on the health needs of over-65 year olds while the health economy faces strong financial pressures. The Council is consulting on the future provision of home care and helping to promote independence through the provision of more appropriate housing and assistive technology. The new administration is committed to providing 1,000 new extra care units over the next ten years through partnerships with housing associations and care providers. Assistive technology is now being provided widely after starting from a low base.

- 121** The Council and its partners offer an increasing range of activities for older people though they are beginning from a low base. These include adult education, family learning, some sport and leisure activities such as keep-fit, yoga and indoor bowls and over-50s sessions at leisure centres. Some activities are focused specifically on BME groups such as English language lessons in day centres and specialist residential and home care. The Council's 40 community centres offer a good range of different activities under one roof such as advice on avoiding falls, exercise sessions, demonstrating assistive technology equipment and IT classes, lunch clubs, keep-fit, arts clubs, chiropody and drop-in centres. The Council will be launching its Over 60s Passport scheme in 2008 and this will offer free and reduced cost entry to the city's leisure facilities as well as providing free bus travel.
- 122** The Council is working effectively with partners to provide services for older people. The Council and police are tackling fear of crime among older people through safer homes projects. A recent neighbourhood focused week of activities had an element which engaged young and older people working together to raise generational awareness and confront stereotypical attitudes. The Council has developed a repeat attenders initiative with the University Hospital Trust Leicester. This aims to increase, share and analyse information and intelligence on those regularly attending hospital for treatment to improve the efficiency of services and to quickly reach accurate diagnoses. The Council and PCT are moving to more pooled budgets to commission a range of services including a joint equipment service and services which can be delivered in partnership with the independent and voluntary sector.

Children and young people

- 123** The Council and its partners have a strong commitment to providing good outcomes for children and young people in Leicester City. Leadership is robust and is driving actions to address areas of underperformance. Outcomes currently vary with some good examples, including those for looked after children and those in need of safeguarding. Other aspects, such as the rate of teenage pregnancy and educational attainment at key stage 4 are poor and significant improvements are needed. Ambitions and priorities are good, owned by the partnership, and supported by the redirection of resources towards areas of poorer performance. Capacity though adequate, is not sufficient to ensure a good rate of service improvement in some areas. Performance management is adequate and improving but is not consistently driving improvements across the partnership. Partners are committed to equality and meeting the needs of its very diverse community. Good examples include the involvement of minority communities in strategic planning, the high spend on services for children with disabilities, and the work of the unaccompanied asylum seeking team. However work to establish a representative workforce has yet to show significant impact, and performance management is not robust enough at a strategic level to drive improvements for some vulnerable groups.

- 124** The combined work of all local services to secure and promote the health of children and young people is adequate. There is good access to specialist children and adolescent mental health services but out-patient services are currently under-resourced. Schools promote healthy lifestyles well, with the number achieving healthy school status in line with similar authorities. Health improvement is promoted well, and there has been a reduction in smoking among young people. Early support and intervention is good for children with disabilities and/or difficulties. However there is no coordinated approach to improving health outcomes in areas of deprivation, including west Leicester, and many outcomes are poor. Teenage pregnancy rates are too high, above the national rate, and only slowly reducing. Partners have taken robust action recently to address underperformance but this has yet to have an impact. A jointly funded lead for strategic joint commissioning chairs the 'Be Healthy' theme group which has wide representation and is driving health performance. The Council and its partners recently engaged the help of the Teenage Pregnancy National Support team, and have established an executive board with senior representation, and a comprehensive and challenging action plan.
- 125** The contribution of services to ensure children are safe is good. The local safeguarding children board provides a strong lead and partners work well at a strategic and operational level to deliver good services to support children and families. Agencies undertake the necessary safe recruitment checks. An effective strategy has resulted in a significant reduction in children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents. Referrals to social care receive a prompt and effective response, and staff are well supervised and trained. All children on the child protection are allocated to a qualified social worker and their cases are reviewed on time. Most outcomes for looked after children are good and improving. They live in safe placements, the majority are placed in foster homes or in kinship care, and placement stability is very good.
- 126** The impact of all local services on improving educational outcomes for children and young people is inadequate. There is a clear strategic focus on raising standards and aspirations, and new strategies are taking the partnership forward in the right direction but have not yet impacted sufficiently. Early years' provision is good and enables children to make a good start to their education, often from a very low base. Standards and attainment at key stages 3 and 4 are too low and remain significantly below the national average. Progress by young people between 14 and 16 has decreased over the past two years which places them in the bottom 5 per cent of all local authorities. Some vulnerable groups significantly underachieve. Looked after young people receive very good support and partners have high aspirations for them. The number attaining 1 A*-G grades is very high. However school attendance is poor, fixed-term exclusions are high, and the number attaining five A*-C GCSEs is low.

- 127** The impact of all local services on enabling young people to make a positive contribution is good with some outstanding features. The youth offending service and partners have successfully reduced anti-social behaviour and there has been a significant reduction in first-time offenders but the rate of re-offending remains too high. The rate of offending among looked after children is too high. Children and young people are well supported in contributing their views through school Councils, the city's young people council, and young people's forums. They are able to make a key contribution to shaping services. Youth MPs meet the Director of Children's Services on a quarterly basis. Looked after young people offer their views through the impressive Stand Up Speak Out group.
- 128** The combined work of all local services in securing and promoting economic well-being is good. Young people make good or better progress in post-16 learning. The percentage obtaining level 2 and 3 qualifications has rapidly improved and is now above similar authorities. Targeted work by colleges leads some young people to exceptional progress, and specific post-16 work meets the needs of new arrivals to the country well. The overall number of young people not in education, employment and training remains high. There have been recent reductions but there are significant variations across the city and vulnerable groups are over-represented. Careleavers receive good support and the number progressing to post-16 education, employment and training is in line with similar authorities. An increasing number of careleavers are attending higher education.

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 Leicester City Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 28 January 2008 to 8 February 2008.
- 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.