

Corporate Assessment Report

June 2008

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Corporate Assessment

City of York Council

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Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under Section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement

Considered against the shared priorities of:

- sustainable communities and transport;
- safer and stronger communities;
- healthier communities;
- older people; and
- children and young people.

- 3 Corporate assessments are normally aligned with a joint area review of services for children and young people (JAR). In practice this means that the Council's achievements in relation to children and young people are assessed using the evidence provided from the JAR. In addition, examples of outcomes and activity, which are relevant to the other themes and which are identified through the JAR, are considered within the corporate assessment.

- 4 The JAR covers specific services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as relevant health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes especially concerning safeguarding; services for looked after children; and services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The separate JAR report also covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that such services work together to improve outcomes. The description and judgement in respect of children and young people in this report is summarised from the JAR report and the most recently published Annual Performance Assessment from Ofsted which covers all of the Council's children services.

Executive summary

- 5 Overall, the Council is performing adequately. Councillors and a new corporate management team are driving forward plans to improve corporate and cross cutting working. They are building on the strong services already in place and partnership working is being strengthened. These improvements are beginning to make a difference but need to be taken further and sustained. The direction of travel is positive and there are good prospects for the future. The Council has made good achievements in a number of its priorities such as a strong economy, good housing, reductions in crime and good outcomes for children and young people but has more to do in other cross cutting areas.
- 6 Community leadership is good and there is a clear vision for the area. The Council and its partners have developed an overarching vision for the City and this is set out in the community strategy which covers the period 2004 to 2024. The vision is based around key themes such as creating confident and inclusive communities, improving and maintaining the environment, a thriving and prosperous economy, education and learning and celebrating the historic past whilst creating a successful and thriving future.
- 7 The community strategy is based on a good understanding of the needs of the area. The preparation of the strategy involved an extensive consultation exercise, a robust assessment of current performance and analysis of the issues facing the city. However, the Council does not have an overall engagement strategy and its approach to equalities and diversity is underdeveloped. This means that, whilst regular engagement with the public is carried out, the results are not shared in a systematic way and there is a risk that some groups will not have the opportunity to contribute.
- 8 The Council has clear priorities set out in its corporate strategy but arrangements to ensure a better focus on the corporate priorities are at an early stage of development. The Council has traditionally focused on its service areas rather than as a corporate whole but is now making a significant investment in improving systems to deliver priorities through a more corporate, integrated organisation. The new Chief Executive and management team are providing strong leadership and have developed a 'York Business Model' to ensure better corporate working. This builds on a number of developments put in place since a critical Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) report in 2005 which highlighted significant levels of 'silo' working amongst directorates.
- 9 Political leadership is effective and decision making is based on joint working across parties. The democratic structure has been developed to reflect the balanced political administration but aspects of scrutiny are not effective. There are some examples of added value in providing challenge and policy development but overall this is not adding sufficient value.

- 10 Human resources management is underdeveloped. The Council is developing its capacity through its organisational development approach and through leadership and management programmes. However, there are a number of weaknesses in human resources management including poor management information, workforce planning and high levels of sickness absence.
- 11 The Council is improving its corporate performance management arrangements, including the introduction of a 'dashboard' approach to focus on key corporate indicators and improvements to partnership performance management. There is a positive direction of travel but there is still much to do to ensure that there is a consistent approach across all services and partnership areas. Service performance management has been effective in most areas and the Council provides good value for money for local taxpayers. Most costs are low compared to other councils and performance is generally good. Work on strengthening the delivery arrangements for the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has been put in place over the past year or so but there are inconsistencies in performance management across all the delivery partnerships.
- 12 Despite the inconsistencies in corporate performance management arrangements, service performance is good and there have been a number of achievements in relation to its priority areas such as the economy, recycling, traffic congestion good housing and improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children and young people. There is more to do in cross cutting areas such as health inequalities, alcohol and drugs misuse, tackling anti-social behaviour and in responding to national agendas around older people.
- 13 There have been good achievements in terms of the local economy. York outperforms its regional comparators in relation to employment, earnings and skills. Income inequalities are lower than other comparable areas and strong plans for the future are in place. The Council has also made significant progress in relation to environmental management and is providing strong leadership around the environment. In 2006, it opened its EcoDepot, which is estimated to save 176 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. Traffic congestion is being tackled and there is a strong focus on encouraging alternative methods of transport.
- 14 Good progress is being made in improving the condition and appearance of the city's housing estates and street scene. Street cleanliness is improving and parks, play areas and public spaces are of a high standard. The Council is taking steps to increase the supply of affordable housing and good progress is being made to improve the standards of existing homes. The Council is on target to achieve the Decent Home Standard by 2010.
- 15 There have been good reductions in the levels of crime and disorder as a result of strong working relationships between the police and the Council. However, there is weaker performance in relation to anti-social behaviour. Whilst there is a clear understanding of health inequalities in deprived areas, progress is at an early stage. The Council, with partners, is making good progress in promoting and supporting the independence and well being of older people but the focus is largely on social care rather than taking a broader view across all Council services.

- 16 Outcomes for children and young people in the City of York area are strong. The priority is to ensure that those from the most disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds achieve and the Council is strong in this area. Looked after children make good progress in health and are improving progress in educational and employment outcomes.

Areas for improvement

- 17 The Council is driving forward plans to improve corporate and cross cutting working. A key part of this is the development of the 'York Business Model' which provides a framework for better corporate working and organisational development. The Council needs to develop robust action plans which clearly identify the intended outcomes, milestones and capacity requirements to ensure its effective implementation and to track the effectiveness of its implementation.
- 18 Other areas that require particular focus are as follows.
 - Improving the Council's approach to diversity and equality issues which is under-developed. The Council needs to focus attention on this area and significantly improve its corporate approach. It needs to progress the work on equality impact assessments and ensure that service planning fully reflects the needs of all communities and to provide a higher profile for diversity and equalities across the Council.
 - Ensuring that scrutiny is effective. The democratic structure has been developed to reflect the balanced political administration and whilst Executive Member Advisory Panels (EMAPs) provide effective pre-scrutiny, post decision scrutiny is often ineffective. The Council needs to review its arrangements for scrutiny so that they add value and contribute to better policy making and performance management.
 - Ensuring that councillors are trained and equipped to carry out their roles by improving attendance at training programmes.
 - Improving the approach to human resource management. There needs to be a consistent human resource management approach and improvements in areas such as workforce development, the diversity of the workforce and reducing sickness absence. Management information needs to improve so that managers can monitor and evaluate the effective implementation and success of HR initiatives and ensure proper and robust management of the organisation.
- 19 Work to strengthen the delivery arrangements for the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) also needs to continue. In order to support the delivery of LSP key priorities, the Council should ensure that the performance management framework for all delivery partnerships is more consistent. The Council should learn from those of its partnerships which are effective in this respect, such as the Children and Young People's Partnership, and transfer this approach to other areas.

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

Context

The locality

- 20 Covering an area of 105 square miles, the district of York comprises an urban area centred on the historic city surrounded by many small rural and semi rural settlements. The area has a total population of 186,000. The black and minority ethnic (BME) population is 4.9 per cent. The proportion of people from BME communities doubled between 1991 and 2001 and is expected to grow further in the next few years.
- 21 The population of the district of York is increasing and is projected to increase by 4.2 per cent between 2001 and 2011 and by a further 8.3 per cent up to 2021. The four institutions of further and higher education bring the total number of students in York to around 20,000 (or approximately one-ninth of the population). Each year York receives nearly 4 million visitors who boost the local economy but place significant demands on the transport system.
- 22 Population growth and a decrease in the average number of people per household is placing pressure on housing. 'Affordable' housing is in particularly short supply and house prices are well above the regional average. Given the historic nature of the city's built environment, planning and development are highly sensitive issues.
- 23 York is a relatively affluent city but this masks pockets of deprivation. There are low levels of unemployment in the city, but high levels of relatively poorly paid jobs, most associated with the tourist sector. Over the last few years, the city has responded to the relative decline in employment in traditional local industries (such as chocolate manufacturing and railways). Traditional industries have been replaced by a high-tech and science based industrial sector linked to the universities. The Council and partners see Science City York as playing an increasingly important part in the development of the city.
- 24 Educational attainment in York is high, with achievements that are significantly higher than both the Yorkshire and Humber and England averages. However, according to the Basic Skills Agency (2003), 23 per cent of the population aged 16-60 years have poor literacy and numeracy skills.
- 25 Health is generally good and life expectancy is greater than the national average. However, there are pockets of poor health in more deprived areas of the city. Levels of crime are below regional and national averages. Congestion is a significant issue in the area as York remains a major tourist destination in the UK.

The Council

- 26 The City of York Council has 47 councillors. The Liberal Democrats have 20 councillors and in May 2007 they formed a minority administration, and an executive of nine councillors, to lead the Council for the next 12 months. The Labour Party formed the Opposition with 18 councillors. The Conservative Party has seven councillors and the Green party has two councillors.
- 27 Each member of the Executive has a portfolio of responsibilities; portfolio holders can take certain delegated decisions within their portfolios. These decisions are taken following advice from a politically balanced Executive Member Advisory Panel (EMAP) which provides a form of pre-decision scrutiny. The Council also has a Scrutiny Management Committee, scrutiny committees on education and health and ad-hoc scrutiny panels. There are also Ward Committees designed to give local people a greater say in neighbourhood governance and Council affairs.
- 28 The Council Management Team (CMT) is led by the Chief Executive (who joined the Council in October 2007) and comprises six Directors. There are six directorates based in 17 buildings throughout the City. The Council employs around 6500 staff. The Council's annual net revenue budget in 2007/08 is £103 million, with gross expenditure estimated to be £379 million. The gross capital budget for 2007/08 is £43 million of which £33 million is funded externally. In 2007/08, Council Tax rose by 4.5 per cent and is approximately £1,223 for a band D property.
- 29 The community strategy for 2004 to 2024 sets out a shared vision for York over a period of 20 years. The strategy was put together by 'Without Walls', York's Local Strategic Partnership. Work on updating the Sustainable Communities Strategy is progressing alongside the development of a new Local Area Agreement (LAA) to succeed the current LAA in early summer 2008.

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

Ambition

Ambition

- 30 The Council is performing well in this area. There is a clear vision for the area underpinned by strong ambitions. The Council provides good community leadership and is an effective advocate for the area. The Council engages with communities in a wide range of ways but there is no overall strategy for engagement.
- 31 There is a clear vision for the area. The Council and its partners on the 'Without Walls' partnership have developed an overarching vision for the City and this is set out in the community strategy. The community strategy covers the period 2004 to 2024 and sets out a vision based around seven key themes of a thriving city, learning city, city of culture, safer city, sustainable city, healthier city and an inclusive city. This document provides the framework for the Council and its partners in setting priorities and action planning.
- 32 The ambitions are challenging. The community strategy sets out a comprehensive range of desired outcomes and ambitious targets for affordable housing, economic growth, climate change and outcomes for children and young people are set out in key strategies that link well to the community strategy. The Local Area Agreement (LAA) 2007 to 2010 sets out medium terms targets and these are in line with national and local priorities. The Council is making good progress with its partners in developing a revised Sustainable Communities Strategy which will set out the partners ambitions and priorities for the City over the next fifteen to twenty years.
- 33 The community strategy is based on a good understanding of the needs of the area. The preparation of the strategy involved an extensive consultation exercise, a robust assessment of current performance and analysis of the issues facing the city. The plan was informed by a wide ranging consultation such as the 'Festival of Ideas' which used approaches such as radio debates, conferences and neighbourhood consultations. The Festival targeted communities of interest, such as older people, people with disabilities, representatives from BME communities and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) residents. The Council does not have an overall engagement strategy, which means that, while generally effective consultation is undertaken, the results are not shared in a systematic way and so the Council and its partners do not know whether all groups in local communities have a chance to contribute.

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- 34** The Council has clearly aligned its own ambitions with those of the community strategy and LAA and these are underpinned by good strategic planning in most areas. The Council's corporate strategy establishes a three year vision and priorities that directly support the vision within the community strategy.
- 35** The Council has a clear commitment to neighbourhood management. It has established ward committees and the needs of all neighbourhoods have been analysed to identify specific local issues. Detailed neighbourhood action plans are being prepared which will set out the ambitions and actions for the area. The draft action plans have been prepared and these are due to be completed in March 2008. This means that the Council is well placed to address issues of a more local concern.
- 36** The Council takes steps to communicate the ambitions to the public through a variety of means. It communicates with the public through quarterly publications along with other methods such as the website and an A to Z of services. The Council has recognised the importance of effective engagement with local people and has plans to re-introduce a residents' newspaper as a way of keeping people informed about plans and priorities.
- 37** There is a strong focus on providing community leadership and an effective voice across the city region. The Leader and Chief Executive provide good community leadership and are seen as effective by partners. The Council participates fully in the sub regional and city region debate and is developing stronger relationships with key regional organisations which play an important role in the economic development of York, particularly Yorkshire Forward. This means that York influences decisions at both city and sub regional level.

Prioritisation

- 38** The Council performs adequately in this area. Priorities for improvement are clear and are explicit in the corporate strategy. The Council is improving its arrangements to help it to focus on its priorities and to improve corporate and partnership working. A number of these arrangements are at an early stage of development and have yet to make the desired impact.
- 39** The Council has a clear set of improvement priorities. The corporate strategy sets out the priorities which are a mix of external and internally focused areas. The priorities are based around improvements in waste and recycling, public transport, street scene, violent, aggressive and nuisance behaviour, skills and knowledge, economic prosperity, health, disadvantaged children and young people and the quality of housing. The strategy was first published in 2006 and refreshed in 2007 when a further priority around climate change was added. The document provides a clear focus on issues that are important to York and balances local and national priorities. For example, the economic, crime and health priorities reflect local as well as national issues. The document provides a strong focus on reducing inequalities in all areas of York.

- 40 The priorities are based on local needs. A number of 'drivers' have influenced the priorities including the community strategy, the LAA, the joint policy prospectus produced by the political parties, resident views, ward priorities, corporate risks and stakeholder views. The Council uses the 'talkabout' and annual residents' surveys to get public views on what are key local issues and has carried out wide ranging consultation on its revenue budget for a number of years.
- 41 The Council takes steps to ensure that resources are allocated in line with priorities. There are clear examples of tough decisions being taken that are in the wider interest of the community, such as the amalgamation of schools and the shifting of resources to priority areas such as recycling and waste and the Council's access project, easy@york. The process for reallocating available resources is less clearly articulated in key documents for cross-cutting service improvement priorities such as health. Priorities for capital projects are clear and are explicit in budget reports.
- 42 There are improving arrangements to ensure that there is a focus on priorities and better corporate working. The Council has primarily concentrated on its service areas rather than as a corporate whole in recent years and is now improving systems and processes to deliver a more corporate, integrated organisation. Much of this is at an early stage but is moving in a positive direction. The Chief Executive has recently developed a 'York Business Model' to ensure better corporate working, but this is not yet supported by action plans for its delivery. The York Business Model builds on a number of corporate developments put in place following an Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) report in 2005, which was heavily critical of the Council's 'silo' working approach. Key plans are also being strengthened. Delivery and Innovation Plans (DIPs) provide a clearer user focus although some outcome targets are under-developed. The Council has recently developed key measures intended to quantify success against the priorities for improvement.
- 43 The Council now communicates well with staff about its priorities but it does not know how clearly staff understand and act on the priorities. It has improved communications after a staff survey in early 2007 indicated a low level of awareness of priorities. Decisions about priorities and objectives are now communicated to staff in a variety of ways including leaflets, summaries for managers, a staff magazine and innovative approaches such as the Chief Executive's blog. Other methods to communicate are used such as the senior managers and corporate leadership groups. The Council is planning to carry out a staff survey in April 2008 to assess the impact of its improved approach to communication with staff.

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- 44 The majority of service plans are robust. There are clear links between service and financial planning and service strategies are underpinned by action plans. Service planning guidance has been strengthened and guidance on target setting has been produced to address weaknesses around the quality of targets highlighted in Audit Commission reports. Further developments include the production of directorate plans to give a more cross-directorate view. Plans for Neighbourhood Services and City Strategy have already been prepared, with the remainder due to be produced by Spring 2008.
- 45 The approach to equalities and diversity is underdeveloped. The Council has made steps to engage with hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups and to address social inclusion but these have not been fully effective. Despite some success, the approach has not been sufficiently strategic or effectively co-ordinated between directorates. Equalities issues have been raised through the Social Inclusion Working Group and the appointment of member champions for social inclusion, older people and children and young people. Initiatives taken to tackle the issues include the equalities conferences on disability and ethnicity, improved partnership working with the voluntary and community sector and specific initiatives to engage with hard to reach children and young people and older people. However, there has been little focus on implementing the corporate equalities strategy or on monitoring progress against it. This makes it difficult to demonstrate that the needs of an increasingly diverse community are being met in a co-ordinated and consistent way. This is particularly important in a city such as York, where the profile of the local community is changing so quickly.
- 46 The Council and its partners are strengthening arrangements to deliver the community strategy priorities. The LSP reviewed its structure in 2007 and now has an independent chair to promote effective partnership working. Delivery arrangements for some thematic partnerships such as the Safer York Partnership (CDRP) have been strengthened but other thematic partnerships have still to make similar progress. For example, the environmental forum and Inclusive York forum provide mechanisms for interested parties to come together to identify issues facing the city, but there is a lack of clarity about how sustainability and social inclusion will be delivered, either directly by these partnerships or by ensuring these issues are embedded in the activities of other thematic partnerships.

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

Capacity

- 47 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Political leadership is effective and is supported by strong managerial leadership. The Council has put in place structures to reflect the political balance of the Council and these are generally effective but post decision making scrutiny is largely ineffective. The Council's arrangements for asset management, risk management and project management are adequate and improving. However, areas of human resources are not well developed and the approach to equalities and diversity is weak.
- 48 Political leadership is effective. Decision making is based on joint working across parties and there is political consensus on priorities in the form of a policy prospectus agreed by group leaders. There are three key member champion roles covering social inclusion, older people and young people. Executive Members take ownership for their areas of responsibility and provide a clear focus within which the organisation can operate.
- 49 Roles and responsibilities are generally well understood but scrutiny is not fully effective. The democratic structure has been developed to reflect the balanced political administration. The Executive Member Advisory Panels (EMAPs) function provides effective pre-scrutiny of Executive member delegated decisions and of performance information through quarterly monitoring. However, post-decision scrutiny is often ineffective and there are few examples of added value in terms of challenge and policy development. This drains Council resources because of the amount of time spent in meetings and the lack of added value from the process.
- 50 An ethical framework is in place and works effectively. Member and officer roles are clearly defined within the Constitution but a recent ethical governance review highlighted the perception from officers that councillors sometimes get involved inappropriately in operational issues. This means that capacity can be used ineffectively as roles are blurred and there is the potential for duplication of effort.
- 51 A framework for councillor development exists but potential benefits are not being maximised. Personal development plans have been introduced, training is available and a small number of councillors have undertaken the Leadership Development Programme. However, these development opportunities are optional and take up has been low. As a result, skill levels of some councillors are not being developed, limiting their potential effectiveness in delivering improvements in line with priorities.

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- 52 Managerial leadership is strong. A new Chief Executive was appointed in October, 2007, and is seen as effective both within the Council and by partners. The management team works well and is positively addressing the 'silo' departmental working culture identified in the IDeA report. For example, the Corporate Leadership Group brings officers across the Council together regularly to address cross cutting issues, such as the implementation of Easy@York. The Council is also enhancing its capacity through its organisational development programme and through leadership and management programmes for managers.
- 53 Human resources management is underdeveloped and has weaknesses. Whilst the Council has developed a Human Resources Strategy there are gaps for example, there is no workforce development plan which identifies current and future workforce needs. There are other issues to address. The workforce is not representative of the local community and sickness absence is high. Whilst the Council is beginning to take action to reduce it, the level of sickness absence is among the worst nationally. The quality of management information is poor and there are significant inconsistencies in terms and conditions in departments which have had a negative impact, for example, on the implementation of equal pay and job evaluation reviews.
- 54 Procurement arrangements are adequate and improving. The three year procurement strategy covers the period to 2010, a competition strategy is being developed for approval in spring 2008 and the supplier contract management system goes live in April 2008. The Council has experience of successful large scale procurement such as private finance initiatives for schools. The approach to procurement has led to savings being made across the organisation during 2007/08.
- 55 Partnership working is generally well developed and is adding to capacity. Voluntary sector partners are effectively engaged, with examples of well established joint arrangements for learning disability and mental health services. These partnerships have improved capacity by reducing duplication and introducing better working arrangements across organisations.
- 56 The Council has a good track record in generating efficiencies and in providing good value for money for local taxpayers. Most costs are low compared to other councils and performance is generally good. Arrangements to improve VFM are good although there are still areas for improvement including better benchmarking and target setting around value for money.
- 57 The Council currently has sufficient financial resources to deliver its priorities but the Council faces some challenges if it is to achieve the projections in its medium term financial strategy, including delivering its ambitious efficiency programme and meeting equal pay claims.

- 58 Asset management is adequate and improving. The Council has continued to improve the management of its assets by assessing backlog maintenance and carrying out an office accommodation review. Separate asset registers are held according to function such as IT, vehicles and land and buildings and although a new IT system to support asset management has been introduced, this continues to run in parallel with the old system. Further improvements are planned including the development and implementation of a repair and maintenance strategy, improvements to asset management information and a fully costed plan to address the level of backlog maintenance. This shows that assets are now being more effectively managed as part of an overall financial strategy.
- 59 The effectiveness of risk management varies. Risks are identified as part of the service planning and decision making processes. The risk register is maintained and risk management is well embedded in large projects. Arrangements are less well established for smaller projects. Information to councillors is insufficient to enable them to play an effective role and to properly understand risks facing the Council. The Council continues to develop its approach to risk management and ensure that it is consistently applied in all directorates.
- 60 Information technology is being used effectively to improve capacity. The Council has an ambitious programme of major system replacement to improve organisational effectiveness. Technology has been used to improve efficiency and customer access at the Easy@York contact centre where efficiency savings have been achieved alongside improved performance through web based transactions and speech server technology.

Performance management

- 61 Performance management is adequate. The Council has traditionally been strong in managing performance within its directorates and this has resulted in good overall performance in service areas. However, there have been long-standing weaknesses in its overall corporate arrangements. It has recently improved these arrangements but they have yet to become an established part of the Council's business management processes. Similarly performance management for key partnerships have improved but there are still inconsistencies in arrangements.
- 62 Corporate performance management is developing. Whilst there is generally good performance and improvements in a number of priority areas, the corporate performance management framework has yet to drive improvement in a consistent way across all areas. In the three years from 2004/05 to 2006/07, 60 per cent of the Council's national performance indicators improved, which is below the average rate of improvement. There are some improvements more recently. In 2006/07, 65 per cent improved, compared to an average rate of 60.8 to 63.2 per cent. In 2006/07, 30 per cent of the Council's performance indicators were in the top quartile nationally which is slightly above average. The Council has sustained good performance in services for children and young people and adult social care services and there are good examples of performance improvement in recycling and planning performance.

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- 63** Elsewhere, improvements have been less significant. For example, whilst the time taken to process new housing benefits claims has improved, performance remains within the worst quartile. Performance in dealing with homelessness has also improved but remains below average. Some corporate health indicators have improved, but two thirds are still third or worst quartile. For example, Council Tax and NNDR collection remains poor and as does performance in areas such as workforce diversity and staff sickness.
- 64** The Council has taken strong action to address the weaknesses in performance management. The Corporate Management Team recently introduced a 'dashboard' approach to ensure a clearer focus on key corporate indicators. The Council has also rationalised the number of performance indicators and clarified the hierarchy of reporting to provide a better focus on what is important. Whilst good progress is being made in improving the framework, there are still gaps in arrangements. The current corporate IT based performance management system does not produce useful reports and it is due to be replaced with an improved system by autumn 2008. Arrangements for scrutiny are also weak. Whilst EMAPS receive performance information, scrutiny management committee does not and the selection of topics for scrutiny review is not systematic. Furthermore, staff appraisals are not being used consistently and effectively across the Directorates. The 2007 staff survey showed that only 63 per cent of staff who replied had had a performance review in the last 12 months.
- 65** In addition to good service performance management, there are other areas of strength. The Council has good financial reporting arrangements. Budget holders are involved in the budget monitoring process and there are regular reports to senior councillors at key stages of the year. As a result budget pressures are addressed promptly. The Council has good arrangements to manage VFM and tracks progress against improvement plans. The improvements to enhance corporate working were as a result of the IDeA and Audit Commission reports.
- 66** The Council uses customer feedback effectively. The Council carries out annual surveys of residents to track performance and inform improvement priorities. For example, the stronger focus on street cleaning was identified as an area for improvement in the 2007 survey. However, it does not make effective use of complaints information. Whilst complaints information is used at service level, there is no corporate information available. Satisfaction with the way the Council handles complaints is low at 30 per cent.
- 67** Arrangements for reporting of partnership performance are still developing but have improved since the introduction of the LAA in 2007. The delivery board currently monitors 68 key indicators from the LAA and community strategy and there are some stronger examples of performance management such as for the Safer York Partnership and YorOK Board which have resulted in the improved partnership outcomes. However, a number of partnerships focus on reporting current performance rather than using performance management to target improvements. Action planning for underperforming areas is not done in a consistently robust way and data is still missing in some areas.

What has been achieved?

- 68 The Council is performing well in this area. Service performance is generally good and the Council has improved priority services including recycling, street cleanliness and sustained its high performance within services for children and young people and adult social care. It is not performing as well in some cross cutting areas such as health inequalities, alcohol and drugs misuse, tackling anti-social behaviour and in responding to national agendas around older people.
- 69 The Council has performed well in its priority of improving the economic prosperity of the people of York and in minimising income differentials. The Council responded to the challenges presented by significant job losses in 2006 and has enhanced its relationships with the business sector following the commissioning of the 'Future York' report from the business community. The report sets out an economic development programme which focuses on expansion of Science City York and implementing the tourism strategy. There are good outcomes in relation to the economy. York outperforms its regional comparators on employment, earnings and skills. Income inequalities are lower than other comparable areas.
- 70 The Council has made significant progress in its priority of decreasing the tonnage of biodegradable waste and recyclable products going to landfill. It has achieved improvements in recycling rates from 17 per cent to 39.3 per cent in three years and is working effectively to address long-term waste management. The Council is providing strong leadership around the environment and opened its EcoDepot in 2006, which is estimated to save 176 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year.
- 71 The Council has been successful in reducing traffic congestion and encouraging alternative methods of transport. The priority has been to increase the use of public and environmentally friendly modes of transport and the Council has invested in park and ride schemes, pedestrianisation and safer cycling routes. Local people are increasing their use of public transport, particularly buses, and 19 per cent of residents cycle to work. This has resulted in levels of traffic remaining stable despite the number of visitors to the city.
- 72 Good progress is being made in the priority area of improving the condition and appearance of the city's housing estates and publicly accessible services. Street cleanliness is improving and parks, play areas and public spaces are of a high standard. The Council has identified affordable housing as a priority within the housing strategy and making good progress in addressing levels of decency within housing; the Council is on target to achieve the decent homes standard by 2010.

- 73 Outcomes for children and young people are very good. The priority is to ensure that those from the most disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds achieve. Looked after children make good progress in health and are making good progress in educational and employment outcomes. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good educational progress, receive good access to health services and are very well supported through transition into adult services.
- 74 Performance in reducing the actual and perceived impact of violent, aggressive and nuisance behaviour is inconsistent. While there is evidence of strong working relationships between the police and the Council which has resulted in falls in crime levels such as violent crime and theft, there are areas where performance is weaker or less developed such as anti-social behaviour, drugs and alcohol services and community cohesion.
- 75 Progress is being made in improving the health and lifestyles of the people who live in York, in particular among groups whose levels of health are poorest. Health outcomes for both adults and children and young people are generally good and improving. There is a clear understanding of inequalities in deprived areas and ambitions in the community strategy to address these, although progress is at an early stage.
- 76 The Council, with partners, is making good progress in promoting and supporting the independence and well being of older people but the focus is largely on social care rather than taking a broader view across all Council services. Older people's issues are not explicit within the corporate priorities. The recent development of older people's strategies and support through the older people's champion demonstrate clear commitment to continuing improvement but the implications for all the Council's services have not yet been identified.
- 77 Outcomes for children and young people in the City of York area are outstanding for 'Enjoying and Achieving', 'Staying Safe', 'Making a Positive Contribution' and 'Achieving Economic Well being' and good, with some outstanding features for 'Being Healthy'. Those children and young people who are most vulnerable benefit from highly effective intervention and support services.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 78 The Council has progressed well in its priorities around the economy and the environment. Good progress is also being made in relation to dealing with traffic congestion. There is good quality housing stock and street cleanliness is improving.

- 79** The Council works well with partners to promote economic development and tourism. York outperforms its regional comparators on annual growth in employment, levels of employment and skills. York has achieved high earnings growth whilst at the same time there are low levels of income inequality compared to other areas. The Council responded to the challenges presented by significant job losses in 2006 and improved working relationships with the business sector and commissioned a forward looking report called Future York' report from the business community. The report sets out an economic development programme which focuses on the expansion of Science City York, the implementation of the tourism strategy and building upon the principles of the thriving city.
- 80** The Council is developing key strategies to support continued economic growth. The Council has revisited plans for the York Central regeneration project to take account of the impact of the recent closure of the British Sugar site. These schemes are now incorporated within the York Northwest Area Action Plan which is currently being consulted on. The Council is addressing gaps in its planning framework and has invested over £1m in delivering the Local Development Framework, which contains a series of key documents which articulate its vision of place for York. Planning performance has improved substantially; the time taken to process major planning applications has moved from bottom to top quartile over the last three years.
- 81** The Council is working from a strong base in developing its housing market. It is taking appropriate steps to increase the supply of affordable housing and has identified affordable housing as a priority within the housing strategy. An ambitious target of achieving 50 per cent of affordable homes on all new developments has been set, which has doubled the previous target. Whilst this is not currently being achieved on all new developments, the numbers of private sector sites being used in the delivery of affordable homes has increased from 7 sites to 75.
- 82** The Council is making good progress in addressing levels of decency within its housing stock. The Council has very low levels of non decent stock and is on target to achieve the decent homes standard by 2010. In the private sector, performance in terms of the levels of non decent stock is above average. The Council is working well with Registered Social Landlords in the delivery of affordable housing. A partnership agreement setting out clear standards and requirements, including the use of local labour has been put in place. Clear outcomes from the agreement are emerging through the development of projects such as Arclight, which is a purpose built facility to tackle homelessness in the city.

- 83 Significant progress has been made in achieving the corporate priority of improving the local environment. The Council has achieved improvements in recycling rates from 17 to 39.3 per cent in three years and it is working effectively to address long-term waste management. The Council has worked with North Yorkshire County Council to seek £65 million Private Finance Initiative funding to provide a long term alternative to waste disposal through landfill. The procurement process has begun, and it is planned that by 2013/14, alternatives to landfill will be operational.
- 84 The Council is providing clear leadership around the environment in line with its priority of reducing its carbon footprint. It opened its EcoDepot in 2006, which is an excellent example of a commitment to sustainable design. The depot houses key operational staff in a high quality work environment and is 76 per cent more efficient than a traditional building of the same size and is estimated to save 176 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. The Council is developing its ambitions for climate change and has set long term targets and outlined a clear schedule for implementing a Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan.
- 85 The Council is performing well in improving the street scene. Street cleanliness is improving following changes in working arrangements and external challenge from Encams. Performance outturns in 2006/07 highlighted that street cleansing was in the bottom quartile but mid-year monitoring identified improved performance following the improvements. The Council has a strong track record in the provision of safe and welcoming parks, quality play areas and public spaces. It has achieved three Green Flag awards for its parks and there is high public satisfaction with parks and open spaces.
- 86 The Council has been successful in reducing traffic congestion and encouraging alternative methods of transport. It has invested in park and ride schemes, pedestrianisation and safer cycling routes. Local people are increasing their use of public transport, particularly buses, and around 19 per cent of residents' cycle to work. This has resulted in levels of traffic remaining stable despite the growth in the economy and tourism. Plans to develop transport are good. The Local Transport Plan for 2006/11 has been rated as 'excellent' by the Department of Transport and the Future York report outlined a comprehensive evidence base to develop future transport policy.

Safer and stronger communities

- 87 There is a clear record of achievement over the last three years in reducing crime and disorder although there are areas where performance is weaker or less developed such as anti-social behaviour, drugs and alcohol services and community cohesion.

- 88 Performance in reducing recorded crime over the last three years has been strong and is set to exceed Local Public Service Agreement targets. Action planning has been used to tackle crimes of concern such as violent crime, residential burglary and cycle theft. The action plan on cycle theft is a strong example, setting out a series of actions including partnership work with retailers, communication campaigns, deployment of mobile CCTV and crime prevention advice. The Council has contributed to a six per cent reduction in criminal damage and a 45 per cent reduction in vehicle interference. The Council and its partners have contributed to a 46 per cent reduction in violent crime in the city centre
- 89 Progress on tackling anti-social behaviour is weaker. While there is evidence of strong working relationships between the police and the Council, there are some areas where a clear evidence base and protocols are not fully embedded. One example is joint working between the Youth Offending Team and the police in tackling anti-social behaviour. There is no overall approach to tackling anti-social behaviour which leads to a reliance on discussion on a case-by-case approach. There has been some progress in relation to perceptions of anti-social behaviour and there are some local initiatives in place but there is a lack of a clear vision on how to tackle the issue. The Safer York Partnership has developed a draft Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy for 2007/08, but this is work in progress and lacks outcomes, outputs and timescales.
- 90 The Council demonstrates an understanding of the importance of reducing fear of crime. The Council worked with partners to tackle the fear of crime through a 'Feeling and Being Safe' campaign, run in July-September 2007. This received positive press coverage and involved all Council directorates. The initiative received positive media attention and police figures indicated a 17 per cent reduction in crime during the campaign.
- 91 Performance in reducing drug and alcohol related harm has been a weaker area and the National Treatment Agency has intervened on this issue. York's current Adult Treatment Plan highlights a lack of capacity and infrastructure to provide an effective evidence base on the challenge of drug misuse amongst the adult population. This is being addressed and there are a range of actions including the appointment of a new Drugs and Alcohol Co-ordinator to improve arrangements. These changes are at an early stage and the impact cannot yet be assessed.
- 92 The Council is effective in planning for emergencies. It recognises the corporate importance of effective emergency planning and has repeatedly learnt from situations and experiences over the last few years. This is most evident in flood management, which has been a significant issue in York in recent years.
- 93 The Council has worked with partners including the police and fire service to reduce road accidents. The specific concerns of local people living in rural areas are recognised and consultation with the community has resulted in improved signage, patrols, speed control measures and education and prevention work in schools. Progress has been most marked in reducing accidents involving children, with the numbers of those involved in serious accidents falling by 50 per cent over the last six months.

- 94 The Council is still developing its approach to community cohesion. It recently developed a hate crime strategy and there are some examples of good engagement with communities and young people. However, the lack of an overall comprehensive community engagement strategy means that there is not a consistent model of engagement across the authority. The Council's procedures on equalities and diversity are underdeveloped. This is important given the changing communities in York and the challenge of further immigration in future years.

Healthier communities

- 95 Health outcomes for both adults and children and young people are generally good and improving. The approach to reducing health inequalities is at an early stage.
- 96 York is a relatively healthy place to live although there remain challenges. The area compares well in relation to levels of obesity, physical activity and lower levels of early deaths from cancer and heart disease. There have also been reductions in infant mortality, smoking in pregnancy and increased life expectancy for females. However, improvements in life expectancy for males have recently slowed down and there are higher than regional average levels of binge drinking.
- 97 There is a good general understanding of the issues to be addressed. Health inequalities have been identified as a priority in the community and corporate strategies. They identify specific actions the Council and its partners will take to address health inequalities and promote health and wellbeing. This includes undertaking a health equity audit and implementing a healthy lifestyle strategy. The LAA also sets specific targets for improvement in areas such as physical activity, smoking, obesity, alcohol misuse and teenage pregnancy over the next three years.
- 98 Action planning is at an early stage. Action is being taken to establish and embed joint working and action planning to ensure effective co-ordination across the Council. A joint appointment of Associate Director of Public Health post has been made and is beginning to enhance partnership working. The next stage is to ensure that health inequalities are built into everyday planning for all services, as many of the actions in the Healthy City theme relate only to social services, rather than across the range of services in the Council.
- 99 There are some good examples of Council and partnership services contributing to improved health. Health services for children and families are being delivered through integrated Children's Centres, with health visitors being located in the hub centres. Good work is being done with York University to understand some of the underlying factors behind teenage pregnancy, with more work to come on BME issues. Coronary heart disease work is targeted in deprived areas and early work is taking place on developing health information packs for migrant workers. Work is also ongoing with travellers on drugs and alcohol misuse. Consequently, although there is a lack of an overarching health inequality strategy, pockets of appropriate work are taking place to address some inequalities.

- 100** There has also been some good work to promote healthy lifestyles. Projects include nutrition needs assessment and smoking initiatives. Smoking in pregnancy has reduced from 26 per cent to 17 per cent as a result of a sustained focus on the issue. Physical activity in schools has increased as has the number of Healthy Schools. There is a good focus on early intervention and prevention such as the provision of drop in clinics in some primary schools by school nurses. Both the Council and PCT went smoke free earlier than legislation required.

Older people

- 101** The Council, with partners, is making good progress in promoting and supporting the independence and well being of older people. Although older people's issues are not explicit within the corporate priorities, the recent development of older people's strategies and support through the older people's champion demonstrate clear commitment to continuing improvement in this area. The focus, however, remains largely on social care rather than taking a broader view across all Council services.
- 102** Adult social care services are good. The Council is working effectively to support people to live in their own homes. There are low numbers of older people being admitted on a permanent basis to residential and nursing home care and there are specialist home care and warden services to support older people. There has been increased access to and take up of assistive technology services such as telecare services. The Council has also been effective in addressing below average performance around delayed transfers from hospital. Well-developed home care services reduce the need for inappropriate admissions to residential care.
- 103** The Council is beginning to assess the needs of older people. It has forecast the demographic impact of the increasing numbers of older people and reflected these in the older people's strategies 'Never too old' and 'Towards an older people's housing strategy'. These clarify local plans to address the needs of older people but there remain gaps. The forecast increase in the older population has been quantified in terms of care services and financial implications on these services. However, the wider implications on other Council services such as libraries, leisure centres and housing have not been quantified at this stage.
- 104** There are examples of good engagement with partners but this is not fully developed. The older people's strategy is a joint document with Selby and York PCT but does not include wider partners such as police and fire services. As a consequence, issues such as home security for older people are not addressed in the strategy. The LSP Partnership Board provides a formal arena in which older people's issues can be considered, but the potential benefits of using the Older People's Assembly, for example, to increase consultation with older people specifically, are not maximised by funding them to do so.

Children and young people

- 105** Outcomes for children and young people in the City of York area are outstanding for 'Enjoying and Achieving', 'Staying Safe', 'Making a Positive Contribution' and 'Achieving Economic Well being' and good, with some outstanding features for 'Being Healthy'. Those children and young people who are most vulnerable benefit from highly effective intervention and support services. The quality of CAMHS provision is exceptionally good with prompt access available for the most vulnerable groups, and particularly those who are looked after, those with special educational needs or learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are known to have offended. Looked after children make good progress in health and improving progress regarding educational outcomes. All leaving school in summer 2007 entered employment with training and are still fully engaged. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good educational progress, receive good access to health services and are very well supported through transition in to adult services.
- 106** Service management in children's services is good. Senior officers within the Council have specific, delegated responsibilities for key functions and perform at a consistently high level. The portfolio holder for children and young people provides exceptional support and engagement. The Council's capacity to improve is outstanding. Children and young people's views are constantly sought and figure very highly in decision making processes at all levels of the service. The Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates a strong social inclusion ethos that adds significant strength to the well targeted preventative agenda. Partnership working has increased capacity to ensure delivery is of the highest standard across services and that the needs of the most vulnerable groups are constantly reviewed and refreshed. Resources, though at low levels, are targeted well and maximise effect. Data systems have been enhanced so that the Council, schools and providers can track individual and cohort progress effectively and take any necessary, appropriate action to ensure continuous improvement.
- 107** The Council's contribution towards improving health outcomes for children and young people is good, with some excellent features. Co-location of services and the excellent multi-disciplinary work within the new children's centres are providing a strong impetus for improving health outcomes. All schools are signed up to the Healthy Schools Award with over two thirds of schools already achieving the standard. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service provides excellent support particularly to the most vulnerable, for example, those children and young people who are looked after and who have offended. Teenage conception rates remain low against national comparators but are rising in the 16-18 age groups. Research is currently underway in partnership with York University to gain better insight into this particularly stubborn trend.

- 108** Children and young people appear to be safe and the safeguarding arrangements are very effective. The City of York Safeguarding Board takes a strong leadership role, encouraging excellent partnership working, particularly in relation to domestic violence and in the investigation and monitoring of allegations against professionals. Most children reported that they felt safe. Early identification, referral and assessment procedures are highly effective and interventions are both timely and well matched to meet needs. There are very few looked after children. The number is below the national average and, whilst the care population has increased due to older young people staying in placements beyond their eighteenth birthday, the number of admissions to care shows a significant reduction. Placement stability is good.
- 109** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve well and enjoy their lives is outstanding. Standards in schools are above average and contribute considerably to the economic well-being of young people. There is a clear strategy for 14 to 19 curriculum development and strong partnership working. The Council continuously strives for improvement in how well it provides for young people, especially the most vulnerable. The progress of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The achievement of looked after children and young people is satisfactory and improving. Parents and carers with the most needs receive excellent support in helping their children to enjoy school. The programme for developing children's centres and extended schools is ahead of regional and national comparators. Effective partnership working across a range of statutory, voluntary and community groups ensures that there are many excellent opportunities for children and young people to extend their interests and enjoy their leisure time.
- 110** The impact of all services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is outstanding. Consultation is at the heart of service development and delivery and there is an excellent range of activities and programmes used effectively to help young people gain confidence and take personal responsibility. Children and young people with disabilities are involved as fully as possible in decisions that affect their lives, such as accessibility to leisure facilities, support in transition into education, employment and training and provision of services in children's centres. The 'Show me That I Matter' panel has been highly effective in engaging looked after young people in challenging Council officers about decisions and planning. The Youth Service and other partner agencies work diligently with those young people who are 'hard to reach' and have achieved considerable success in encouraging reluctant learners back into main stream schools.

- 111 The impact of services in helping children and young people achieve economic wellbeing is outstanding. Provision for family learning is outstanding. The proportion of young people in education, employment or training is very good and much higher than average. Low levels of young people not involved can be attributed to improved guidance and tracking post 16 as well as the introduction of very successful personal development programmes which encourage and support young people to move on to more formal learning. There is a clear strategy for 14 to 19 curriculum development and strong partnership working to extend the choice of both academic and vocational pathways. Looked after young people post 16 and those leaving care are very successful in finding and sustaining jobs with training. Provision for those young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is expanding but still remains insufficient to meet demand.

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 City of York Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 29 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.