

Corporate Assessment Report

June 2008



# **Comprehensive Performance Assessment**

**Chelmsford Borough Council**

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## Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under Section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.
  - What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?
    - Ambition
    - Prioritisation
  - What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?
    - Capacity
    - Performance management
  - What has been achieved?
    - Achievement and Improvement

## Executive summary

- 3 Chelmsford Borough Council has made sustained progress since its corporate assessment in 2004 when it was rated 'good'. It is now rated as 'excellent'.
- 4 Since 2004, the Council has further strengthened its systems, to support improvements, in particular a strong focus on performance management. The Council's approach to equalities and meeting the needs of diverse communities has progressed with tangible outcomes and benefits for most local people. These actions have resulted in further improvements in service performance and high levels of user satisfaction across the Council. The Council faces significant challenges and opportunities from its key role in delivering the Regional Spatial Strategy, in which it has a target to develop 22,000 new jobs and 16,000 new homes before 2021. The Council, working in partnership, is taking positive action to meet these challenges.
- 5 The Council and its partners have a challenging but realistic vision for Chelmsford. The long-term vision for Chelmsford is for the area to become the economic, cultural, leisure and retail heart of Essex and a regional centre for the East of England. The vision forms a common focus for both the Community Plan and the Corporate Plan. It arises from comprehensive needs analysis and consultation with local people and other stakeholders. Strong community leadership and effective partnership working are delivering sound progress towards the ambitions and ensuring the building blocks to meet longer-term challenges are in place. Local people are clear about the vision and ambitions for the social and economic development of Chelmsford but less clear about the Council's ambitions for a sustainable environment.
- 6 Five strategic themes and 15 aligned priorities underpin the Council's vision and ambitions. These accurately reflect the outcomes of consultation and enable the Council to focus on the delivery of statutory targets. Staff own the priorities and understand their role in delivering them. The priorities are inclusive seeking to meet the needs of the diverse communities of Chelmsford. The strategic themes are Excellent Customer Services; Renaissance; Social Inclusion; Environment; and Value for Money. A robust framework of strategies is in place to support the delivery of the priorities. However, the extensive plans supporting the delivery of the strategies lack clear short-term targets, which focus on outcomes for local people. While resources are effectively redirected to support the achievement of priorities, plans are not costed.

- 7 There is strong leadership both politically and managerially which focuses effectively on delivering the priorities of the Council. Training and development is further increasing the capacity of both councillors and staff to deliver priorities. Overview and Scrutiny is improving but its impact is not yet consistent. Partnership working is good and improving, delivering outcomes, which are mutually beneficial. The Council is managing its resources and risks in an efficient and effective way. The delivery of priorities links to a robust medium-term financial strategy. Improved human resource management is effectively reducing sickness absence. Costs for providing services are average but performance well above average. Improved procurement practice is delivering savings and contributing effectively to the achievement of wider corporate priorities.
- 8 Performance management is effective and driving improvement. The Council has invested in its performance systems, which are now robust. They identify areas of under performance and lead to timely remedial action. Councillors and managers are actively involved in the monitoring of performance data and where appropriate they redirect additional resources to deal with poorly performing areas. The Council is taking effective action to strengthen performance management such as improving the performance management of partnerships.
- 9 Since 2004, the Council's performance has shown significant improvement. Over the last four years, the pace of improvement has been faster than most other councils, although comparatively this was less so in 2006/07. This progress means the Council has a high number of performance indicators that are among the best twenty-five per cent in the country. High levels of user satisfaction across Council services confirm this strong performance. The Council is delivering improvements in all of its priority areas. It is successfully supporting new jobs and homes including those that are affordable. Social inclusion is improving through better community safety and local, national and international events that promote social cohesion and celebrate the diverse communities of Chelmsford. The Council is maintaining and improving high quality cultural and leisure facilities including nationally recognised parks and open spaces. However, the Council's progress with aspects of its climate change initiative is limited and further action is required to ensure that council buildings comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

## Areas for improvement

- 10 The Council should ensure the delivery of its priorities are underpinned by service plans which include SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely) short and medium-term targets with outcomes which focus on what is important to local people. These plans should include costs to allow the integration of performance and resource monitoring. These plans should drive service improvements and deliver what is important to both residents and visitors in a cost effective manner.
- 11 The Council should ensure that its ambitions for a sustainable environment are explicit, understood and owned by local people and sufficiently challenging to deliver environmental change in line with its other ambitions. This will provide greater clarity for local people on what the Council wants to achieve for the environment and how it will deliver leadership in this area.

## Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*	Weighted score
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3	6
	Prioritisation	3	6
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3	6
	Performance management	3	6
What has been achieved?	Achievement and Improvement	4	28
<b>Weighted score</b>			<b>52</b>
<b>CPA category</b>			<b>Excellent</b>
<b>*Key to scores</b>			
1 – below minimum requirements – <b>inadequate performance</b>			
2 – at only minimum requirements – <b>adequate performance</b>			
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – <b>performing well</b>			
4 – well above minimum requirements – <b>performing strongly</b>			

### \*Banding thresholds for determining CPA category

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

# Context

## The locality

- 12 Chelmsford Borough Council is located in the heart of Essex within 35 minutes of Central London by rail. The Borough is well connected with major dual carriageway links to London, Colchester, Basildon, Braintree and the East Coast ports of Harwich and Felixstowe.
- 13 Chelmsford is one of ten districts and two unitary councils within the county of Essex. The county town of Chelmsford is the major centre of population in which approximately 59 per cent of the population live. The next largest settlement in the borough is South Woodham Ferrers with 11 per cent of the population. In addition, there are 25 parishes covering 27 villages and suburbs, with one town council in South Woodham Ferrers.
- 14 The Borough covers an area of 344 square kilometres with large rural areas. Over a third of land is designated as green belt. The Borough has a population of 163,000 (mid 2006 estimate) which has grown by more than 10 per cent over the last 20 years. A quarter of the population is under 20 years old, with 15 per cent aged over 65. The population is ageing and the proportion that is of working age will decline within the next four years. Census data and mid-2004 population estimates indicate that Chelmsford has a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population of 3.3 per cent. The largest BME group is Indian (0.59 per cent of the population). There are a significant number of Gypsies and Travellers living within the Borough.
- 15 There are low levels of deprivation with the Borough ranked 352 out of all 388 local authorities in England (where 388 is least deprived). Chelmsford is one of the 10 per cent wealthiest communities in England and unemployment is low. However, there are pockets of deprivation and one in ten children still lives in households dependent on means-tested benefits. Both male and female life expectancy is higher than the national average. Educational achievements are above the England average. Crime rates are low.
- 16 Chelmsford is the largest provider of employment opportunities in Essex. Approximately 76,000 jobs exist within the Borough, with the main occupations being financial services, retail and customer service. Writtle College, the regional centre for land based industries and Anglia Ruskin University are both based in the Borough. There are high levels of out-commuting to London, especially for employees in the financial industry.

- 17 The percentage of the working population in employment is 86 per cent ( June 2007) which is above the national average. There is high job density (the ratio of jobs to working age population) with about 89 jobs per 100 people of working age compared to a national average of 84. The job seeker's allowance claimant count for January 2008 is relatively low for Chelmsford as a whole at 1.3 per cent. The average weekly earnings of people who live in Chelmsford are £505, which is above both regional and national averages. The need for affordable housing is high. Chelmsford is designated a key centre for development and change within the East of England Spatial Strategy, which requires the creation of over 20,000 new jobs and 16,000 new homes in the Borough before 2021.

## The Council

- 18 Chelmsford Borough Council is controlled by the Conservatives, which holds 31 of the 57 seats. The Council has adopted a Leader and Cabinet structure, with an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and an Audit and Governance Committee. There are nine portfolio holders, each responsible for one or more of the Council's priorities.
- 19 The Conservatives took control in May 2003 following eight years of Liberal Democrat control. A new Chief Executive was appointed in July 2004 and a new management structure was introduced. This reduced the number of senior management posts from two deputy chief executives and 19 heads of service, to one deputy chief executive and eight corporate directors. This structure is being revised further during March 2008.
- 20 The Council has a net revenue expenditure of £18.9 million in 2007/08 rising to £19.8 million in 2008/09. It had a capital expenditure of £7.7 million in 2007/08 and a budget of £9.2 million in 2008/09. The Band D council tax for 2008/09 is £151.92. The Council has 1,149 employees.
- 21 The Audit Commission assessed the Council as 'good' in 2004 (out of a five-point scale of poor, weak, fair, good and excellent).

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

### Ambition

- 22 The Council is performing well in this area. There is a clear vision supported by challenging ambitions for the social and economic development of Chelmsford. Effective needs analysis and consultation ensures that they reflect what is important to local people. The Council and its partners are demonstrating strong community leadership in delivering this vision. Although local people are clear about the ambitions for parks and open spaces and economic regeneration, they are less clear about the ambitions for a sustainable environment.
- 23 The Council and its partners have a clear and challenging vision for Chelmsford. The long-term vision agreed by partners in the new community strategy for Chelmsford is for the area to become the economic, cultural, leisure and retail heart of Essex and a regional centre for the East of England. This ambitious vision for economic growth and community development builds on the previous community plan and supports the delivery of both regional and national targets. The vision reflects the ambitions of local people for example for more homes and jobs and their pride in Chelmsford as the County Town of Essex. Both the Local Strategic Partnership's community plan and the Council's corporate plan share this as a common vision with a target for delivery by 2021. The emerging Chelmsford Local Area Agreement (LAA) focuses on the ambitions and priorities for local people and provides a clear link with the countywide LAA targets. Councillors demonstrate a strong commitment to delivering the vision. Local people, partners, and staff understand and own the vision. The Council and its partners have made it clear what they want to achieve for Chelmsford.
- 24 Challenging ambitions for economic and social development underpin the delivery of the vision. Chelmsford Tomorrow, the Council's corporate plan, details the ambitions of the Council. Specific and detailed ambitions, for example for developing cultural and leisure facilities, such as the Riverside redevelopment, are in place to complement the overarching plan. The Council's ambitions for managing strategic development and growth are in the Core Strategy of the Local Delivery Framework. However, while the delivery of a sustainable environment is an integral and important part of the Council's work, ambitions in this area are not explicit and not understood by local people. Most but not all ambitions for the future of Chelmsford are clear to local people.

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

- 25 The Council's vision and the priorities which support it are based on the outcomes of consultation and reflect what local people think is important. Consultation is robust and an extensive range of consultation methods is used effectively and leads to change. For example, better information and advice services for residents in North West Chelmsford. Incentives are used to encourage local residents to respond to consultation. Consultation outcomes inform the development of key plans such as Chelmsford Tomorrow, and the Local Development Framework. For example, concerns from local people about recycling have led to the Council introducing higher recycling targets of 34 per cent by 2010/11. The Council has a good understanding of local needs and shares this with partner agencies; for example the economic needs assessment provides a robust analysis of the factors influencing economic growth in Chelmsford. The Council understands what is important for local people.
- 26 The Council is taking positive and effective action to engage with its local communities. Residents think the Council keep them well informed on general matters although some concerns remain about the redevelopment of the Riverside centre. Partner organisations report the Council has a good understanding of its local communities. The Council uses high quality publications to communicate effectively with the public, staff and external stakeholders. Community engagement through the Diversity Forum and older people information days are helping the Council to understand and meet the needs of its diverse communities. For example, the Council is now better at engaging with minority groups including facilitating a new black and minority ethnic group (BME) forum and improving engagement with the travelling community. Engagement with local people on crime and disorder contributes to improvements in community safety such as reductions in anti-social behaviour. As a result, the Council has a good understanding of its local communities.
- 27 The Council, with its partners, is delivering effective community leadership. The Council is using its statutory powers innovatively to ensure the infrastructure to support high levels of housing growth, such as improved transport links, are in place. It is ensuring that regional and national developments meet the needs of local people. The development of a Chelmsford local area agreement enables partner organisations to focus resources on local priorities. The Council and its partners are effectively targeting areas of deprivation for example by developing a North West Chelmsford Community Plan. Tangible outputs include a new community and health centre in the Melbourne estate. The Council's drive has resulted in the successful delivery of high profile national and international events including the V-Festival and the International Scout Jamboree. It has been successful in having several sites in Chelmsford recognised as training centres for the 2012 Olympic Games. The Council uses its powers and influence effectively to deliver the ambitions for Chelmsford.

- 28 The Council is working effectively with partners to develop and deliver the ambitions for Chelmsford. The Council is clear about what significant partnerships it is involved in and how these can help to deliver key ambitions and strategies to benefit the area. The 'Chelmsford Tomorrow' business plan was developed in partnership to deliver a co-ordinated approach to infrastructure development. Active partnership working with other councils is improving the area for example the development of a park and ride scheme with Essex County Council and flood protection plans with the Environment Agency. The new community plan for Chelmsford has a strong focus on delivering benefits for local people. It will build on the current community plan, which resulted in improved partnership working. Partners have a shared understanding and a common focus on delivering the vision for Chelmsford

## Prioritisation

- 29 The Council is performing well in this area. Priorities are clear, well understood, and inclusive. They effectively underpin the delivery of the vision and ambitions of the Council. The delivery of priorities is supported by robust strategies together with clear medium and long-term targets for improvement. There is effective investment and reprioritisation of resources. However service plans to deliver the priorities do not consistently use SMART, outcome related targets and are not costed.
- 30 The Council's priorities effectively underpin the delivery of its vision and clearly reflect local needs, statutory requirements and national targets. The priorities are detailed in the Council's corporate plan, which identifies strategic targets for each priority, for example, achieves e-service standards for all customer services. The Council has five main strategic themes and 15 aligned priorities which are:
- *'Excellent Customer Services; put customers at the heart of our work, strengthen capacity to continually improve services;*
  - *Renaissance; adopt the local development framework to help deliver the Council's vision, expand retail, leisure, sports, parks, heritage and cultural opportunities, secure investment to deliver future infrastructure;*
  - *Social inclusion; embrace equality and celebrate diversity, tackle deprivation in the wards of North West Chelmsford, provide housing that meets local need, maintain a safe community;*
  - *Environment; maintain high quality public places, reduce the impact of climate change in the Borough, increase recycling rates and reduce waste; and*
  - *Value for Money; make best use of our resources, innovate through new approaches to service delivery, strengthen partnership working.'*

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

- 31** Councillors, staff members and stakeholders have a good understanding of the Council's priorities. The Council has effectively communicated its priorities externally through its publications and on its website. Internally, the Council has promoted its priorities well through monthly meetings with the Chief Executive, regular core briefings and the 'Late Opening' programme, which involves staff in key topics such as the Corporate Plan, continuous improvement and diversity. The 'Eureka' scheme rewards staff for suggestions and ideas for service and organisational improvements. Consequently, stakeholders know what the Council intends to deliver.
- 32** The Council and its partners are focusing on priority areas. For example, they have made improvements to the quality of life in North West Chelmsford a priority. The Council and its partners have designated the area as an Action Area within the Community Plan and the Corporate Plan. This is already producing some tangible benefits for local residents including sports facilities and a one-stop shop to enhance local access to services. A community allotment has also been developed which provides a useful resource for local people to learn about growing their own produce. Children from a local special school have used the allotment to help develop skills that can maintain their health and well-being. As a result, the quality of life for local people in this area is improving.
- 33** Strategic plans to deliver the Council's priorities are robust. These accurately identify what is important to local people set in the context of national targets and statutory requirements. The priorities underpin not only the Council's Corporate Plan, but also the Sustainable Community Plan and Chelmsford's Local Area Agreement. Thus, the priorities are integral to plans of both the Council and its partners. The plans and strategies contain medium and long-term targets for the delivery of the priorities; for example, to reduce domestic and commercial energy use by fifteen per cent over two years and double the number of jobs created as a direct result of foreign investment by 2009. This helps to set milestones against which to measure progress. Delivery of the corporate priorities is supported by high quality strategies. These detail the aspirations for the delivery of corporate priorities and identify targets for delivery. For example, annual targets for housing completions and increasing levels of participation in sport and leisure by older people by 5 per cent. The Council's strategic approach to the delivery of its priorities is clear.

- 34** Service plans support the delivery of strategies but do not consistently use SMART, outcome-focused targets. Service plans are explicitly linked to the delivery of corporate priorities and detail actions, targets, milestones and responsibilities for delivery. Actions are identified for 2006/07 and 2007/08 allowing progress to longer-term strategic targets to be monitored. Plans are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure they are driving improvement effectively. Targets focus strongly on the delivery of national performance indicators and some local indicators, for example, the percentage of passenger and disabled lifts in working order. Service plans identify outturns against these indicators and set targets for succeeding years. However, service plans sometimes focus on the process of improvement rather than the expected outcomes. Not all actions are linked to quantitative targets or milestones, particularly where there is no national or local performance indicator identified. Costs are not part of the plan. As a result, it is therefore difficult to evaluate progress and impact on service improvement.
- 35** The Council is using its resources effectively to support the delivery of priorities. It focuses on those areas, which are important to local people, and takes difficult decisions to resource these. The Council has disposed of unwanted assets to support its key priorities, for example, brown field sites to support the development of affordable homes. It is investing in the delivery of corporate priorities for example improved ICT capacity to support service improvements, the development of multi tasking administrative teams to release funding for front-line services such as planning and benefits. The Council is investing its resources effectively to deliver its priorities
- 36** The Council has identified what are not priorities and is using this to reprioritise resources. It is prioritising front line services over back office functions so more resources can be invested in those services that will directly benefit local people. For example, the movement of resources to support the recruitment of two equality and diversity officers is further prioritising this area of work. The decision not to fund a Marconi gallery as part of the museum development is an example of resources being redirected from non-priority areas. The Council has made a conscious decision not to invest to drive up high levels of performance further, for example in council tax collection and development control. The effective reallocation of resources is helping to address priorities and improve services to the local community. The Council is maintaining a consistent focus on delivering its priorities.

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

- 37** The Council is taking action to further improve and prioritise equalities and diversity. It has achieved level two of the equalities standard and is moving towards level three during 2008. All directorates have appointed service equality representatives. Social inclusion is a strong theme throughout corporate and service strategies for example the local delivery framework targets accessibility and social inclusion for all. All service plans include actions and targets to improve equalities. Service areas have accurately identified gaps in their knowledge of some minority and vulnerable groups and are taking positive action to improve. For example, the parks department engaged a marketing company to find out if they were reaching diverse communities resulting in an outcome to improve access to play facilities for disabled children. The Council is prioritising the needs of vulnerable and minority groups.

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

### Capacity

- 38 The Council is performing well in this area. The Council is effectively developing the capacity to deliver the fifteen corporate priorities and contribute to the achievement of partner organisations. Strong political and managerial leadership both within the Council and across partnerships is contributing to the effective delivery of shared objectives. Financial and risk management are good as is the achievement of value for money. Investment in ICT capacity is now delivering tangible benefits for local residents. The capacity of staff and councillors to deliver and improve high quality services is good and improving. Overview and Scrutiny is improving but its impact remains inconsistent.
- 39 Political and managerial leadership is strong. Senior Officers are decisive and are clear about what needs to be done to achieve the Council's priorities. Committees, such as the Cabinet, are effective and lead to transparent decisions. Councillors and managers challenge performance and deliver improvement. There are good relationships between councillors and senior corporate managers. For example, the '2 to 2' meetings in which the director of finance and finance portfolio holder, challenge budget bids and planned efficiency savings for each of the other portfolio holders. There are clear protocols for councillor and officer working. Councillors effectively delegate decision-making regarding operational matters to officers. The Council has policies in place, which are upholding high standards of ethics, probity and integrity. Effective leadership is providing a clear direction and contributing to the delivery of positive outcomes for Chelmsford.
- 40 The overview and scrutiny function is improving but its effectiveness is inconsistent. There is good engagement and cross party political involvement in overview and scrutiny. Each of the 15 members of overview and scrutiny is now responsible for monitoring progress against one of the corporate priorities. However, this is not yet fully developed and the effectiveness of the arrangement varies. Scrutiny receives regular exception performance reports on performance indicators. This helps to provide a focus on performance, which has led to improvements in for example sickness absence performance. The task and finish groups are delivering benefits for the public, such as improved access to the town centre and for staff for example improvements to reprographics. However, the pace of work in other areas is slow for example, the Clean Green Report has been ongoing for 18 months with no clear outcomes.

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

- 41** Partnership working is extending the capacity of the Council and its partners to achieve shared priorities. The Council has taken action to improve and maximise the benefits of its partnership working. It has identified the eight significant partnerships that are strategically important in helping it to deliver its ambitions. As a result, the Council is directing its energies into those partnerships that will have the greatest impact on delivering community priorities. Partners report that in the last eighteen months the Council has become more outward thinking enabling engagement that is more effective. For example, joint working with Chelmer Housing to improve the quality of life in North West Chelmsford is restoring the confidence and pride of local residents. Shared working with other local authorities is improving capacity and delivering efficiencies for example a joint revenues service with Rochford District Council. The Council is making effective use of partnerships to deliver its priorities.
- 42** The Council has shown leadership and increased capacity among the voluntary sector. The Council provides core funding to support Chelmsford Voluntary Services (CVS) that has a membership of around 300 voluntary and community groups. In January 2008, the CVS received a Big Lottery Fund grant to provide information and intensive support to voluntary groups and charities over the next five years. A compact for the communities of Chelmsford 'Working Together' focuses on increasing awareness, developing partnership and engaging the wider community in decision-making. The Council has a grant aid programme to help community groups deliver projects that help to achieve its priorities. It helps to build capacity in the community particularly in its work with parish councils for example the Leisure, Cultural and Parks Project Support scheme aimed at local organisations and individuals to improve quality of life through local projects and events.
- 43** The management of financial resources and value for money is good. The Council has clear plans and a strategy for meeting its budget requirement for 2008/09 based on the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS). These plans show an awareness of cost pressures and a robust evaluation of potential risks facing the Council over the next three years. There is an effective process for approving and monitoring capital expenditure to ensure that projects help to achieve corporate priorities. The Council has taken action to identify areas for potential savings to meet budget shortfalls. Its arrangements for delivering value for money are good. Costs for providing services are average but performance well above average. Areas of higher service expenditure such as waste collection reflect corporate priorities although the Council is looking at ways to reduce these costs. The Council understands why it pays more than other councils to deliver some services for example in planning and has taken effective action to reduce its costs. The Council is managing its resources in an efficient and effective way.

- 44 Investment in ICT capacity is now delivering tangible benefits for local residents. The Council recognised that this was an area for attention and in 2006 launched an Information and Computer Technology (ICT) transformation programme to improve facilities. The Council has invested in ICT to support internal capacity and drive improvements for service users. Consequently, electronic access to services has improved. Notable examples include an improved website, e-payments and a new phone system that makes it easier for residents to contact the Council. Introduction of the planning portal allows online submission and monitoring of planning applications thus making it easier for the public to submit and track progress. An online booking facility for the Council's theatres allows customers better choice and access. Improved use of ICT is enhancing the capacity of the Council to deliver its priorities.
- 45 Improved procurement practice is delivering savings and contributing effectively to the achievement of wider corporate priorities. The new procurement strategy links to the delivery of the Corporate Plan although plans to support delivery of the strategy are not yet in place. As part of the procurement strategy, the Council monitors supplier compliance with diversity and environmental standards. This helps ensure the Council is maintaining its role as a community leader as well as delivering effective procurement. The Council is sharing its best practice through partnership working with Basildon and Brentwood Councils. It delivered £218,000 of cashable savings through improved procurement practice, such as an online procurement manual, in 2006/07.
- 46 The Council is increasing its capacity through effective workforce development and planning. The Human Resource Strategy sets out a clear vision about what the Council needs to do to develop its people capacity, which is good. Succession planning through the Talent Management scheme is helping to develop capacity. The draft Learning and Organisational Development Strategy sets out the skills that will improve councillor and staff performance. Staff appraisals are good linking improvements in individual capacity to the delivery of corporate priorities. Plans to achieve single status are in place and resourced. The Council has developed a workforce profile and this is being used to identify the future skills and number of employees required to deliver the corporate priorities and new and improved services for future populations.
- 47 The Council is extending its capacity through the effective development of Councillors and staff. Robust training and development programmes are in place for strategic skills development for councillors and staff. Organisational development activities support shared learning and help to build capacity. Examples include the Brunchtime Seminars, Managers Action Conferences. Regular core briefings on key issues delivered through the GEM (general e-mail) system support organisational development. The Council is taking effective action to improve the capacity of both councillors and staff.
- 48 Reductions in sickness absence are increasing capacity to deliver services. Effective management action to reduce sickness absence including monthly reporting of all absence, the introduction of trigger points, and new ill health capability procedures, has resulted in absence falling from 10.27 to 8.77 days in 2007/08.

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

- 49 There is a robust system to manage risk. The Council is clear about how it manages risks and the links to performance management. Councillors are actively involved in risk management. They identify strategic risks and review these quarterly. All significant projects have a detailed risk register. In addition, the Council has assessed the risks for the eight significant partnerships such as the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) and the Local Strategic partnership (LSP). There is regular training on risk management for both staff and Councillors. Councillors and staff identify and manage risks effectively.

## Performance management

- 50 The Council is performing well in this area. Performance management focuses effectively on the delivery of corporate priorities. Performance systems are good and improving. As a result, performance is improving in key areas for the benefit of local people.
- 51 The Council has effectively prioritised improvements in its performance systems, which are now good. The Council's corporate plan 2004/07 focused two of its three priorities on improving performance management systems and the monitoring of performance. Performance management is now effective. The Council has identified ten key performance indicators, which are important to the delivery of the corporate plan. The Council allocates one of the key performance indicators to a cabinet member and senior officer who are responsible for its delivery. Service areas review performance against performance targets monthly while the corporate management team, Overview and Scrutiny review them quarterly. A common performance framework, supported by quality software, provides a detailed breakdown of performance data, which is accessible to both councillors and staff. This helps to provide a systematic approach to managing performance and provides early warning of problems.
- 52 Performance management leads to performance improvement in priority areas. Rigorous performance management and the investment of additional resources results in performance improvement. Housing benefits performance has improved significantly, for example by investing in permanent staff and now is comparable to the top twenty-five per cent of Councils. Targeting individual manager performance in invoice payments and introducing better monitoring of this indicator led to top quartile performance in 2006/07. As a result, effective management of performance leads to service improvements in key areas, which benefit local people.

- 53** There is a robust approach to managing projects. The Project Improvement Panel determines which projects should be initiated and meets monthly to performance manage them against milestones and expenditure targets. Membership of the Panel includes both councillors and senior managers. They hold those responsible for delivery to account. Projects, which are important to local people, such as the refurbishment of Hylands House, are increasingly being delivered according to timescales and budget. Projects, which are not meeting targets or are no longer delivering corporate priorities are stopped; for example plans to develop a fleet management system. A project support team provides training and support for project managers across the Council. These measures have addressed a known weakness in this area. As a result, project management is now effective.
- 54** Performance management of partnerships is improving but the impact is inconsistent. Effective performance management is in place where service level agreements underpin partnership working. There is some evidence of performance management in partnerships such as the crime and disorder reduction partnership and the children and young people's strategic partnership. Performance monitoring by the local strategic partnership has been limited although plans are in place to develop a more robust performance framework for the new Community Plan. Challenging the performance of partners through overview and scrutiny has been limited. The Council is not yet clear what all of its partnerships are delivering.
- 55** The Council responds positively to external review and challenge. Following a survey of housing register applicants, the Council changed the allocation system to one that was less complicated to understand and more transparent. The assessment for the Planning Charter mark highlighted a cramped and crowded reception area for enquiries and lack of private interview facilities. Because of this finding, the Council changed the layout of the reception area to make it more user friendly. There is a strong culture of effective and responsive complaints handling across all service areas. Satisfaction with complaints handling is high. Complaints inform service planning and delivery for example the redesign of benefits reception area to improve both access and privacy. However, there is no systematic corporate process for recording or acting on shared learning from complaints. The Council learns from external feedback and uses this to improve services.
- 56** The Council is taking action to enhance aspects of the quality systems, which are underdeveloped. It is improving data quality relating to new immigrant communities which is incomplete. This includes a joint project with the County Council to identify new immigrant communities and improvements to service monitoring data. The Council is planning to introduce a value for money model, which brings together data on performance, cost, quality, and benchmarks against comparators. However, this is at early stage and the impact is not yet demonstrable. The Council is investing effectively to improve its performance systems further.

## What has been achieved?

### Achievement and improvement

#### Excellent customer services

- 57** The Council is performing strongly in this area. The Council defines excellent customer services as ensuring that the right services are delivered to the right people in the right way at the right time. The Council has demonstrated a sustained improvement in performance since its last corporate assessment in areas important to local people. Sixty five-per cent of indicators have improved ranking the Council 38th out of the 238 districts for improvement. Fifty-two per cent of its indicators are comparable to the best performing councils and well above the average for all district councils. It demonstrates performance comparable to the best performing councils in most of its priority areas. The Council has taken positive action to address the priorities identified by local people such as the availability of affordable homes and it has provided support and leadership in improving health and reducing crime. Performance in services which impact directly on local residents is strong and improving for example performance with respect to regulatory activities such as planning control and transactional services such as invoice payment and accuracy of benefits processing. In 2006/07 high levels of performance led to the award of a planning delivery grant of £407,678.
- 58** The Council is effectively increasing access to services for local people. The Council holds a twice-yearly diversity forum, which has resulted in changes to service delivery such as better signs in the town centre. A further outcome from the Diversity Forum was the Council funded an external review of access into 700 town centre properties. The outcomes are available to residents and visitors through the Council's website and have improved access for example to disabled car parking. The Council is making access to services easier, particularly for those who are vulnerable, by providing a mobile customer information service which visits hard to reach communities, an outpost Council office in South Woodham Ferrers and a one stop shop in North West Chelmsford. The website is now transactional enabling people to pay for services online. The Council has also introduced pod casts in a range of languages to improve information for those whose first language is not English. The Council has plans in place to enhance physical access to its public buildings and increase its compliance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act for example improved access in the Riverside Leisure centre led to it gaining the inclusive fitness award. However the Council has only recently put these plans and the necessary resources in place with delays linked, in part, to decisions being taken on the future use of Council owned buildings. The Council is thus making it easier for people to use its services but physical access to Council buildings remains limited.

- 59** The Council can demonstrate high and improving levels of user satisfaction across all key service areas. The Council is prioritising customer satisfaction as a key measure of its success. Overall satisfaction with the Council is top quartile as is satisfaction with service areas, which are important to local people such as leisure, cultural services parks and environmental services. Residents are satisfied with opportunities to engage with the Council and the way that it deals with complaints. Local people feel the Council and its services have improved strongly over the last three years and praise its forward thinking approach for example in developing the retail sector and high quality parks and open spaces. The Council's excellence in customer standards is recognised by external agencies for example through the achievement of Chartermark awards.

### **Renaissance**

- 60** Actions taken by the Council are delivering 22,000 new jobs. Unemployment figures are below the average for Essex. The Council has surpassed its target for supporting new business creation achieving 645 new businesses by July 2007. It has provided financial support to double the number of business starter units in the Waterhouse Business Centre to fifty. It is working closely with the Business Forum for example to ensure that small businesses can access central government training grants. Nine thousand jobs were created in the Chelmsford area between 2001 and 2006 including the relocation of large-scale employers such as the M&G European Operations centre.
- 61** The Council is taking effective action to support the development of 16,000 new homes before 2021 and the infrastructure to support them. Between 2001 and 2007 there have been 4,098 dwelling net completions meaning that the Council is on track to deliver its challenging Regional Spatial Strategy targets. The Council is making good progress in delivering its Local Development Framework (LDF). Consultation on the LDF was innovative and exemplary. It was awarded the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, President's grand prix award for public sector consultation. The LDF core and supplementary plans provide a strong focus on supporting high quality development, which meets local needs. The introduction of a standard charges scheme, which provides an innovative approach to the management, and use of planning gains is supporting the delivery of the Local Development Management Plan (LDMP). The LDMP enables key delivery partners to manage, prioritise and allocate all funds to support the delivery of Chelmsford Tomorrow. The Council has also effectively supported the development of improved infrastructure such as a new central bus station, flood mitigation measures and new road schemes. The Council has the building blocks in place to deliver significant growth.

- 62 The Council is taking positive and effective action to deliver affordable homes. The Council has a strong track record in delivering affordable homes. It uses developer contributions, invests its own capital funds two million pounds per annum allocated between 2004/05 and 2008/09, and sells its own assets to support the development of more affordable homes. £10.5 million was allocated to affordable housing projects in Chelmsford, during 2006/08, from the National Affordable Housing Programme. It has consistently delivered top quartile performance in the number of affordable homes built although in 2006/07 delays in completing housing developments meant that it did not achieve its own challenging target of 150 homes. New planning guidance is now delivering a more challenging target of thirty-five per cent affordable homes on residential development of more than fifteen homes. A strategic enabling team is facilitating links with the housing associations to capture best practice. For example, the Council's affordable Housing Directory is good practice and is to be rolled out across Essex. The Council and its partners have taken robust and effective action to reduce the number of empty homes in Chelmsford for example through an assured tenancy scheme and a rent and deposit guarantee scheme. This enabled it to achieve 94 homes per year against a target of 30. It achieved top quartile performance for the percentage of private homes returned to occupation or demolished in 2006/07. The Council understands local housing needs and is taking effective action to meet them.
- 63 The Council is investing in and delivering their priority of high quality cultural and leisure services. The Council, following consultation with local residents has invested £5 million in extending and improving its high quality museum facilities. The Council achieves many external accreditations for its cultural and leisure facilities. It has achieved QUEST accreditation for all leisure facilities and APSE accreditation for sports facilities. In 2008, it received visitor accreditation from 'Visit Britain' for Hylands Park. The Council is delivering, with partners, a high quality arts service with an extensive arts programme for both local people and visitors.
- 64 The Council is delivering its ambitions to be a regional centre for the East of England by developing and hosting national and international events. The Council and its partners effectively support and manage high profile events. The V-festival is an example of cross directorate working and reflects the Council's extensive experience of large-scale event management. The event contributes approximately £8 million to the local economy each year. In 2007, the Council hosted the 21st World Scout Jamboree in Hylands Park with over 40,000 scouts attending and raising Chelmsford's profile as a regional centre of excellence for hosting high profile events. These events have reflected well on the Council and given Chelmsford international recognition.

## Social inclusion

- 65** There are low levels of crime and disorder in the Borough. The Council as a partner in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership performs well in contributing to the creation of safer and stronger communities. The Council's CCTV facilities are good and contribute to crime reduction. For example, car park safety is improving with the installation of CCTV and car crime reduced by 62 per cent in 2006/07. There are no reported car crimes on the park and ride scheme. A Safer Towns group is contributing to further investments in improving community safety for example the 'Street Pastors Scheme'. An extensive programme of holiday activities for children and young people is helping to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour. The Council works effectively with partners to reduce crime.
- 66** The Council is delivering an extensive programme of events to engage local communities and build on good social cohesion. There is a wide range of well-received cultural activities. These include the Celebrate Chelmsford Campaign, the One World Festival and Street Diversions. It is supporting events to celebrate equalities for example Black History Month and a Holocaust Memorial event. Residents highly value these cultural events.
- 67** The Council is taking effective action to improve the lives of vulnerable people. A range of events is targeted at under represented and vulnerable groups. These include the annual 'three foot event' for children and information days for older people. The older people's strategy focuses on improving services and support for older people such as the expansion of GP referral schemes and a calendar to provide information. In partnership with Age Concern, the Council has supported successful courses on food safety and nutritional value for older people and those with learning difficulties. These courses have been well received by participants and helped to improve their nutrition and health by improving knowledge of food hygiene and healthy diets. The Council is taking effective actions to engage with all sectors of the community.
- 68** The Council is working effectively with partners to improve the health of local residents. The Council is supporting the development of healthier communities. It is taking positive action to improve the quality of life of minority and vulnerable groups for example through support for a healthy living clinic in its most deprived estate and improvements to services for travellers. The Council is positively promoting sport and increasing participation by all groups. It has supported the relocation of Chelmsford Football club back into the City and has developed high quality indoor sporting facilities for use by all sections of the community. The Council, the Primary Care Trust and the Riverside Leisure Centre deliver 'Junior Live Life', which is an exercise referral scheme for children and young people. A similar 'Live Life' exercise referral scheme is in place for adults with members eligible for reduced leisure membership costs after the 12-week course.

- 69 The Council is delivering robust equality action planning for both employment and service delivery. It is increasingly meeting the needs of its diverse communities well. The Council has achieved level two of the equality standard. It is on track to achieve level three in summer 2008. The Council has robust plans in place to improve the way in which it manages race equality from a comparatively low base in 2006/07. However, while the ethnic mix of the workforce is improving, black and minority ethnic groups remain under-represented. The Council has successfully converted an unauthorised traveller encampment into a new and extended site improving the quality of life for both travellers and the local community. The Council and its partners are taking positive action to combat homelessness and long stays in bed and breakfast accommodation such as the Homebuy scheme and the development of sheltered lodgings for young people.

### **Environment**

- 70 The Council is taking effective action to protect and maintain a high quality environment. Parks and open spaces in Chelmsford have had their quality acknowledged through the award of five Green Flags. The Council has a Green Apple Award, recognising environmental best practice, for the work of the Neighbourhood Environmental Action Team (NEAT). Planning guidance has ensured the City benefits from green spaces being an integral part of urban development. The Council is addressing issues of biodiversity effectively through the biodiversity action plan for example by providing grant aid for the management of wildlife sites and protecting ancient woodland in Chelmsford.
- 71 Progress on actions, which affect climate change, is mixed. An 'Air Quality Management Plan is in place and pollution levels associated with traffic congestion are being monitored. Decisions are being taken which will conserve energy and limit environmental impact such as the use of ground source heat pumps as part of the museum developments. The Council is supporting local businesses to develop green travel plans. Its commitment to using park and ride and developing a network of cycle ways is contributing to reductions in vehicle pollution in Chelmsford. It supports home energy visits and provides advice and guidance leading to improved energy efficiency in residential and commercial properties. The Council and the Chelmer Housing Partnership signed the Nottingham declaration on climate change in autumn 2007. However, the ecological and carbon footprint of Chelmsford is higher than comparable districts. The tangible outcomes from the climate change group's work are limited and strategic partners have not yet committed to a Community Environment Code of Practice.

- 72 The Council's environmental performance is generally good but the amount of waste collected is too high. Residents feel the Council is delivering effective and efficient waste services. Levels of recycling and composting are good and improving. In 2006/07, the percentage of waste recycled and composted was 32 per cent an increase of 2 per cent over the previous year and above average. The amount of waste composted was comparable to the best performing Councils. However, the amount of waste collected by the Council remains high and places it among the worst performing Councils despite a reduction of ten per cent in the previous year. Local people feel the Council keeps the Borough clean although the level of litter is high in some areas. It performs well in removing fly posting and graffiti.

### **Value for money**

- 73 The Council is taking effective action to deliver and improve value for money. The Council has delivered efficiency savings totalling £3.785 million between 2004/05 and 2007/08 while maintaining the quality of its services. This exceeds Government targets. Procurement is making good savings for the Council; unaudited data identifies savings of £788,000 in 2007/08. The Council and its partners have made good use of external funding to support its priorities. For example, lottery funding has provided sports facilities for example athletics and football that can be used and enjoyed by the whole community. The Council has established an improvement programme, which has an overall purpose to deliver improvements for customers and create the conditions to sustain an excellent organisation. The plan is leading to more effective targeting of staff and financial resources into the transformation of frontline services. The Council delivers good value for money.
- 74 The Council is effectively using partnership working to generate efficiencies and internal investment. Partnerships are increasingly delivering benefits for all participants such joint working with the County Council on infrastructure development to support the delivery of the Regional Spatial Strategy. The development of shared services with other Councils is leading to increased capacity and mutual benefits. In partnership with Braintree District Council, it will receive eleven million pounds of growth funding to invest in infrastructure development and flood defence schemes. The Council is sponsoring inward investment events to create better links with commercial agents and developers and generate investments in Chelmsford. For example, the Council is working with developers to deliver the planned twenty-nine million pound redevelopment of the Riverside Leisure Centre. Partnership working is delivering benefits for local people.

- 75 The Council is using technology and innovative methods of service delivery to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Investment in ICT has resulted in benefits for service users including improved electronic access to services and a better website. The new planning portal allows users to make online submissions. The Council has successfully used blue tooth technology to communicate with local people, promote local democracy and increase the percentage of local people voting. Capacity in key services such as planning has improved through the introduction of new pre-application enquiry procedures. Service areas are delivering efficiencies through new technology for example solar powered pay and display machines. The Council uses new ways of delivering services to improve its value for money.

## **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 Chelmsford Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from November 2007 to April 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.