

Corporate Assessment Report

September 2008



Corporate Assessment

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council

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Introduction

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

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement

Considered against the shared priorities of:

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

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

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

Executive summary

- 5 Overall, the Council is performing adequately. It is action orientated and pursues opportunities to deliver its priorities as they arise. Councillors, staff and partners are enthusiastic and committed to providing high quality services and the Council has a track record of taking difficult decisions to secure its objectives. However, the Council has recognised that more needs to be done and is stepping up its focus on improvement. There are good achievements in the local economy, the environment, securing safer communities and children and young people. But other areas such as older people and healthier communities need further development particularly in the context of the area's industrial history.
- 6 Plans are in place to improve corporate working and the delivery of the ambitions and priorities for the borough. Councillors are committed to the vision for the borough and providing leadership and impetus to the Council's plans. The vision reflects the needs of the borough and is widely shared and understood. The new Chief Executive has had a positive early impact both internally and externally. Improvement plans are built on the good and well-performing services provided by the Council and improvements are beginning to have an impact.
- 7 The Council provides good community leadership. Ambitions are widely understood and shared by councillors, officers and partners. There is an overarching shared vision for the area for 2004-2021 and this is reflected in the Council's strategies and plans. Action to deliver the vision is expressed in terms of six challenges. These are: creating more employment opportunities; tackling crime and the fear of crime; investing in children and young people; creating a clean and sustainable environment; improving health and wellbeing; and, promoting neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion.
- 8 The community strategy and draft sustainable community strategy (which informs the new Local Area Agreement (LAA)) are based on a shared understanding of the needs of the area. Both strategies were developed from a wide ranging round of consultation. The Council's approach to engaging with its communities is good. This ensures that everyone feels that they have had their say on the strategic direction of the borough.
- 9 The Council has a set of clear priorities in its corporate plan and other key plans and strategies but these, and the action plans to support their delivery, are large in number and do not provide a clear focus for action. Prioritisation is an acknowledged area for development. Significant investment is now in place to improve the Council's corporate working through the delivery of nine projects as part of a wider improvement programme. These were established after a peer review report by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in January 2008 and have yet to have a consistent significant impact on the Council. The Chief Executive provides strong and visible leadership to the Council and is rebuilding the corporate management team after a number of retirements.

- 10 Political leadership is effective but the political situation in the Council is finely balanced. Although there is considerable agreement on the vision and objectives for the borough there is often contention within debates on local issues. There is however close and effective working between groups on a range of issues including scrutiny. But scrutiny is not fully effective in contributing fully and consistently to policy development and holding the executive to account.
- 11 The Council has sound finances and resources have been moved to priorities. The Council acknowledges that its approach to medium term financial planning needs further development to ensure that the financial risks of policy decisions are considered fully in budget development.
- 12 Workforce planning is being developed further and sound plans are in place to improve this area. Other aspects of the Council's capacity are being addressed through the nine corporate projects already mentioned. These include valuing staff, risk and project management and information technology. These projects are yet to deliver their planned outcomes although there have been some early achievements in the area of valuing staff.
- 13 The Council is improving its approach to performance management and is supporting its plans through the implementation of new systems. Visible and effective challenge is not consistently evident in the current framework. The performance review of individuals does not happen consistently through the Council but plans are in place to address this. There is a focus on value for money and a strategy is in place supported by an action plan to drive its implementation.
- 14 Overall the Council and its partners are making improvements to the borough. Deprivation is reducing overall but becoming concentrated in a smaller number of areas. These improvements are not being recognised by local people. The level of public satisfaction with the Council in the most recent survey is in the worst 25 per cent nationally. In a quality of life survey in 2006/07, 16 per cent of respondents thought that their neighbourhood had got better in the past three years while 36 per cent thought it had got worse.
- 15 There are good achievements in the priority areas of regeneration and economic development. Planning is being used effectively and appropriately to further the ambitions and priorities for the area. Steps have been taken to address local housing market failure in some areas of the borough and this is an area of focus in developing an agreed master plan for the greater Eston area. Good progress is being made in waste management. Beacon status was awarded for waste and recycling in 2006/07. Recycling rates at 36 per cent are amongst the best 25 per cent nationally. A range of initiatives has improved the quality of the street environment.
- 16 Achieving safer and stronger communities are priorities for the Council. Rates for some crimes have recently reduced but overall rates have increased since 2003/04. Accident rates have fallen and the borough has Beacon Status for emergency planning. Eighty one per cent of people identify very or fairly strongly with their neighbourhood but less so, 68 per cent, with the borough as a whole.

- 17 Health and social care services are well-regarded by users and the older people's champion is providing effective leadership on this issue within the borough. Work by the Council and its partners has had a positive impact on circulatory disease and cancer but health inequalities are not reducing within the borough or compared with the rest of the country. The Council and partners' approach to planning services for older people has not consistently gone beyond health and social care.
- 18 Outcomes for children and young people in Redcar and Cleveland are good. Outcomes have significantly improved in targeted priority areas such as sexual health and substance misuse. The majority of children and young people are provided with a safe environment and safeguarding outcomes are mainly good. There is a strong track record of improvement in education and performance is above that of statistical neighbours in many respects. The gap between outcomes for the most vulnerable and those for most children is narrowing.

Areas for improvement

- 19 There is a growing list of priorities coming from the strategy development and planning which is underway. Their number and range create uncertainty about what really are the priorities of the Council and its partners. The Council should ensure that these are rationalised to provide clarity for staff and partners in the context of the new local area agreement and the Council's new corporate plan.
- 20 Councillors need to ensure that they remain focused on the agreed ambitions for the borough as a whole and avoid being distracted by local disputes whilst fulfilling their political role.
- 21 Scrutiny needs to be improved to provide consistent constructive and rigorous challenge to the administration and an appropriate input into policy development.
- 22 The Council has rightly identified nine key areas where it needs to improve corporate working. It needs to ensure that the improvement projects for these areas deliver the planned outcomes. Performance management is not explicitly recognised in this improvement programme. It should be formally incorporated into this programme to make its operation more consistent and effective throughout the Council.
- 23 The Council and its partners need to remain focused upon reducing the gap in the quality of life between the borough and the national picture. They need to complete their work on the strategies for health and wellbeing and older people, developing action plans to deliver improvements in these 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 five themes	Overall corporate assessment score
Two or more themes with a score of 4 None less than score of 3	4
Three or more themes with a score of 3 or more None less than score of 2	3
Three or more themes with a score of 2 or more	2
Any other combination	1

Context

The locality

- 24 Covering an area of 96 square miles, the borough of Redcar and Cleveland contains significant contrasts of environment, prosperity and development. 140,000 people live in an area bounded to the north by the River Tees, the east by the North Sea, the south by the North York Moors and the west by the town of Middlesbrough. Ninety per cent of the borough is rural, with the west of the borough much more urban than the east. The main towns are Eston, Guisborough and Redcar. Internationally important steel and chemical producers are based along the Tees and Tees Port, which is within the borough, handles 10 per cent of UK port traffic.
- 25 Over 98 per cent of the population is white. The largest black or minority ethnic group is Asian and concentrated in the urban area of Greater Eston. The population is stable but forecast to decline slightly to 139,000 by 2029.
- 26 Failure of the housing market in some areas of the borough contrasts with a lack of affordable housing in others. Employment is dominated by a few large industrial and logistics employers. The small and medium size business sector is relatively weak and agriculture has ceased to be a significant employer. Businesses involved in research and development, particularly in sustainable technologies, are becoming more significant.
- 27 The seaside towns of Redcar, Marske and Saltburn continue to attract visitors but at a lower level than in their heyday in the middle of the last century. Redcar has around one million visitors a year but a general reduction in spending by visitors and local people has contributed to a decline in the quality of the shopping available in the area. The town's sea front was used to represent Dunkirk in the film Atonement.
- 28 Overall the quality of life in the borough is worse than in many other places. Many areas of the borough are doing well economically but there are significant areas of deprivation. The borough's relative position nationally improved from 44th to 50th most deprived between 2004 and 2007. But over the same period the pockets of deprivation in the borough worsened widening the gap between these communities and the rest of the area. Secondary school performance has improved since 2004 but the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE is below that of statistical neighbours. Life expectancy has increased for both sexes but remains below the national average and that gap has widened for women. Alcohol misuse is a significant problem with around 24 per cent of adults estimated to binge drink. Smoking and obesity are significant issues too. Crime remains above national and regional figures but below those for the Tees Valley. Anti-social behaviour is a significant concern for many in the borough. Transport is an issue for many in the borough with low levels of car ownership and poor public transport in many communities making access to services difficult for some residents.

The Council

- 29 Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council has 59 councillors. Elections in May 2007 led to a change in control from a coalition of Liberal Democrats, Conservative and Independents groups. The current administration is a partnership of 28 Labour and 2 independent councillors. The opposition comprises Liberal Democrats (13 councillors), Conservatives (11), East Cleveland Independents (3), Eston Independents (2) and Independents (2).
- 30 There is a ten councillor Cabinet of five men and five women. It includes nine Labour and one independent councillor. The Cabinet portfolios are for rural affairs (combined with the leadership); culture, leisure and tourism; highways, transportation and planning; housing and neighbourhood renewal; community protection; health and social wellbeing; children's services and education; economic development; corporate resources; and environment; The Main Overview and Scrutiny Committee oversees scrutiny activity in the Council. Three departmental overview and scrutiny committees examine area management, health and wellbeing and children's services. All scrutiny committee chairs are Labour councillors and the Chair of Main Overview and Scrutiny attends Cabinet without voting rights. Ad hoc and time-limited scrutiny panels review important emerging issues. There are councillor champions outside of the Cabinet for eight specific policy areas and provide visible leadership for the Council for these issues. Three of the champions come from outside the Labour group.
- 31 Five area committees provide a mechanism for engaging with the public on issues in their neighbourhoods. They oversee the work of the area management staff and allocate resources from a small local budget. They also provide a local forum for partner organisations, such as the Police, to interact with residents. Area committee chairs are drawn from the Conservative and Labour parties.
- 32 The Executive Management Team (EMT) is led by the Chief Executive and comprises three Strategic Directors (adult and children's services, area management and finance and procurement), and the Assistant Chief Executive (Monitoring Officer). The team is relatively new as the Chief Executive took up her post full time from January 2008 following the retirement of the then Chief Executive in December 2007. The new Director of Adult and Children's Services (following the retirement of his predecessor) took up his post on 12 May 2008. Adult and Children's Services also includes housing and leisure and culture services. The Chief Executive has established an Extended Executive Management Team which brings EMT together with the four officers responsible for regeneration, strategic planning and performance management, communication and engagement and human resources (HR).

- 33 Council offices are located around the borough with significant facilities in Eston, Guisborough and Redcar. The Council employs around 7,000 staff. Its net revenue budget is £117 million for 2008/09 (£109 million 2007/08) with gross expenditure estimated at £320 million (£302 million). Council Tax rose by 4.9 per cent in 2008/09 to £1,214.63 for a band D property. The Council's capital programme for 2008/09 is £53 million of which some £35 million comes from grants, capital receipts and other sources. The remaining £17 million is funded by borrowing.
- 34 The Council's housing stock was transferred to Coast and Country Housing (a registered social landlord) in 2002. Tees Valley Leisure Ltd (an industrial provident society) manages the Council's five leisure centres under a contract which was recently extended. Adult social care is provided by a mixture of Council, NHS and private providers. Support services are now largely operated in house after a review of contract performance but revenues and benefits continue to be provided by an external contractor.
- 35 The community strategy for 2004 to 2021 was developed by the Redcar and Cleveland Partnership (the local strategic partnership for the borough). A sustainable community strategy has been developed, underpinning the new local area agreement (LAA) which is now with Government for agreement.

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

Ambition

- 36 The Council is performing well in this area. There is a clear vision for the borough supported by a challenging set of ambitions. These are based upon a shared sound understanding of the borough's needs. The Council provides effective leadership and plays an appropriate part in wider partnership working in the Tees Valley. It is particularly good in engaging with its communities and is a well-regarded partner.
- 37 There is a clear vision for the area and its communities. This is to make the borough, " ... an attractive place to live, visit, work and invest". The Community Strategy sets out in general terms what successful delivery of this vision will mean for the borough by 2021. Action to deliver the vision is expressed in terms of six challenges. These are: creating more employment opportunities; tackling crime and the fear of crime; investing in children and young people; creating a clean and sustainable environment; improving health and wellbeing; and promoting neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion. The clear vision and the challenges provide an overarching framework within which the actions of the Council and its partners can be prioritised.
- 38 The ambitions are challenging. The community strategy sets out a comprehensive range of desired outcomes and ambitious targets to deliver these are set out in key strategies that link well to the community strategy. The LAA 2007 to 2010 sets out medium terms targets and these are in line with national and local priorities. The Council and its partners have developed a revised Sustainable Community Strategy which underpins the new LAA which will run from 2008 to 2011 (awaiting Ministerial approval). Both LAAs provide clear evidence that ambitions are aiming to make real and measurable improvements for local people. Work with other councils in Tees Valley on issues such as transport within the proposed multi area agreement show a commitment to ensuring that the borough's interests are represented and addressed in sub-regional planning.
- 39 The Council communicates its ambitions effectively. The new administration is clear about what it wants to achieve and has rooted this in the longer term vision and ambitions for the borough which are shared across the different political groups within the Council. The Council and its partners are clear about their respective roles in delivering the ambitions. The Redcar and Cleveland Partnership provides mature and appropriate leadership in its areas of responsibility. Partners are enthusiastic about the ambitions. The shared commitment within these partnerships provides a strong basis upon which to deliver for local people.

- 40 The Council and its partners have a shared understanding of the needs of the borough. The community strategy includes a high-level analysis of key issues and trends. The Council and its partners have consulted with local people in developing their ambitions using a range of approaches. This commitment to engagement has continued in the preparation of the new sustainable community strategy which includes a 'what you have told us' section within each theme. Substantial consultation and engagement have supported the development of the new strategy including work with groups representing those most at risk of disadvantage. The Council and its partners have also used a number of Community Engagement Forums, the Citizens' Panel and service user groups to inform the development of the strategies. This work means that the strategies reflect the needs of individuals and communities.
- 41 Data has been used effectively to develop the ambitions and its use is being developed further. The Council and its partners have invested significantly in the research capacity of the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit (JSU). This has provided good quality analysis to enable the Council and its partners to understand the scale of the challenges facing the borough and this has been used to inform the ambitions. For example, the Council and its partners produced area profiles in May 2007. These have been used by both the Council and some partner organisations to plan their activities. Plans are in place and action has begun to translate this data into ward-level analysis. Better quality intelligence enhances decision making.
- 42 The Council provides strong and positive leadership through its involvement in the LSP and in championing initiatives to deliver ambitions. Its leadership of the LSP is inclusive, with partners feeling that their views are valued and taken account of. Relationships are managed well, creating a positive culture of trust and co-operation and providing the right environment for positive partnership working. Through health screening for its employees and the introduction of modern apprenticeships the Council is leading by example as a major employer in the borough in taking action to contribute towards the achievement of local ambitions. These practical steps are seen by partners as proof of the Council's willingness to act on issues, fostering trust and a shared commitment to delivery.
- 43 The Council has taken difficult decisions to support the achievement of its ambitions. It has improved service performance by bringing some back office functions back in house from a private sector contractor. It has reduced its exposure to financial risk through being ahead of most other councils in the North East in implementing a single status agreement for pay and successfully minimising claims against it. In moving to alternate weeks for refuse collection it has increased recycling rates and reduced the landfill requirements from waste minimising the Council's exposure to the impact of the landfill tax. The current administration has also taken difficult decisions including its pursuit of the development as part of its regeneration ambition at Coatham Links in Redcar against a determined, well-organised and well-resourced opposition. This track record of taking and delivering on difficult decisions bodes well for the Council's ability to deliver its ambitions.

Prioritisation

- 44 The Council performs adequately in this area. Priorities for improvement are clear and shared widely within the Council and with partners. But there is an absence of prioritisation within the priorities leading to uncertainty about whether all the priorities can be delivered within current resource constraints. Action is being taken to deliver outcomes in priority areas, but there is a growing list of priorities arising from the various plans and strategies under development. The Council is reviewing the corporate plan to ensure it provides a robust overarching strategy to deliver the priorities in a co-ordinated and consistent way.
- 45 Priorities relate to the needs of the borough and are linked to the needs assessments undertaken to support the development of the community strategy 2004-2021. The Council's overriding priority is to secure more prosperous lives for the people of the borough. This and the other priorities are reflected in the current corporate plan 2007-2010 and expressed as: sustainable communities; safer stronger communities; healthier communities and older people; children and young people; and, corporate efficiency, quality and equality. These relate closely to the national priorities agreed between central and local government. The corporate plan 2007-2010 contains 48 more detailed priorities setting out how the overarching priorities will be achieved. The detailed priorities reflect the targets within the LAA and articulate what the national priorities mean in the context of Redcar and Cleveland. The Council's clear understanding of the needs of the borough puts it in a good place to revise priorities when necessary.
- 46 The Council is undergoing a considerable period of transition with a new administration, new executive leadership and a new LAA. The corporate plan is under review to ensure it reflects the information gathered in developing the sustainable community strategy and the new LAA. The Council has worked well with partners to develop the sustainable community strategy and the new LAA. These reflect the needs of the area. Comprehensive plans are in place to review priorities in light of this intelligence and for this work to be completed by autumn 2008 in time to support the budget planning process for 2009/10. In the meantime processes are in place to ensure that Council activity is planned in the context of the new LAA as well as reflecting the existing LAA.
- 47 There is a wide and shared understanding of the Council's strategic objectives. The Council has taken steps to communicate its objectives and priorities to external stakeholders and councillors and staff. This clarity is appreciated by partners and they understand how the Council has prioritised resources to deliver priorities. Communication and engagement has been by a number of routes not least through advocacy and leadership from both local politicians and managers. Some plans and strategies are not yet complete or are being revised and there is therefore some uncertainty amongst partners about how priorities might need to change. The Council has plans in place to address this through further engagement as the new corporate plan is developed. The shared understanding of current objectives and the Council's plans for future communication promotes a shared commitment to their delivery.

- 48 Robust plans and strategies are not all in place to deliver the priorities. Sound plans are in place for housing, waste, transport and emergency planning but other strategies are still being developed or reviewed. Consultation on the older people's strategy has just begun, the Council's health and wellbeing strategy is nearing completion, and strategies for alcohol, healthy eating and culture are also in preparation. A strategy for developing the master plan for the regeneration of Greater Eston is in place and the South Tees Masterplan is being implemented to enhance the economic development of the south bank of the Tees. The corporate plan and the children and young people's plan are being reviewed. The absence of plans in some priority areas mean that the Council and its partners can not be certain that their actions will deliver the necessary improvements in the short, medium or longer term.
- 49 Action plans to deliver the priorities are not uniformly good. Some, like the one for housing clearly state lead responsibilities, resource requirements, risks, milestones and target outcomes. But others such as the climate change strategy do not. Action plans are often focussed at a borough-wide level rather than responding to the different characteristics and needs of different areas. The Greater Eston strategy and the local plans for children's services are exceptions to this. The frequent absence of the key elements of effective action plans reduces their usefulness for the Council and its partners in their management of the delivery of the priorities.
- 50 The corporate planning process is not used consistently across the Council. Service delivery plans are produced for each of the four directorates and these are underpinned by service plans, team plans and individual staff appraisals. The service delivery plans are very general and descriptive for example the Adults and Children's Directorate service delivery plan is more like a prospectus than a plan to drive improvement. However, there are some supporting business plans produced by service managers that are driving performance improvement. The unevenness of the quality of corporate planning reduces the effectiveness of the Council's prioritisation.
- 51 The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) process is clearly aligned to priorities at a high level. Additional funding has been allocated to priority areas such as the environment, community safety and social care. The process also takes account of the impact of changes to funding regimes and mainstreams some previously externally funded services. It includes a clear process to target financial resources to priority areas in 2008/09. These include investment in Community Safety Wardens and anti-social behaviour, an alternative education project, along with ongoing investment in the Building Schools for the Future programme, and intermediate care services for older people. In 2007/08 the Council invested £1.3 million in residential care for older people and £910,000 in direct payments to increase choice for users in line with its priorities.

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

- 52** The Council is action orientated and pursues opportunities to deliver its priorities as they arise. It successfully bid for funding from the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) and secured some £10.9 million in additional investment to stimulate local small businesses with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged areas. This links clearly to the Council's first challenge to create more employment opportunities. Elsewhere it has supported business to encourage additional inward investment such as the development of a new crude oil refinery (generating some 2,500 construction jobs over the next four years) and the building of a bio-mass power plant. The Council's proactive approach is appreciated by partner organisations and has built trust and led to further opportunities which will benefit the borough economically.
- 53** The Council has moved resources in response to changing priorities. For example it decided to withdraw resources from the highways programme for improving the standard of unadopted roads. The resources were then used to refurbish public toilets in Redcar and Saltburn. The change in investment enabled the delivery of a key improvement benefiting a wider range of residents and visitors. More recently, councillors used the 2008/09 budget setting process to shift some £3 million of core funding to priority areas including regeneration and older people. The shifting of resources to priorities is a positive indicator but in the absence of robust plans and strategies in many areas means that the Council can not be certain that all priorities are adequately resourced.
- 54** The Council has worked well with the community and voluntary sector to give priority to the needs of minority groups. It has run specific projects to support asylum seekers moving into the area, along with targeted work in schools, projects with Asian youth groups and dance events. Resources have been secured for the next three years to build on progress achieved to date by the community cohesion partnership.
- 55** The Council is making good progress on its approach to equalities and diversity. It has reached level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) and has undertaken a substantial programme of training on equalities and diversity issues for staff, managers and councillors. All policies are subject to equality impact assessment, but the Council can not show how these are used consistently to improve and develop policy. Achievement of level 3 of the ESLG is an important milestone in ensuring that the Council has the capability to meet the needs of all its communities.

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

Capacity

- 56 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Political leadership is effective and managerial leadership is good. The finely balanced political situation has contributed to a culture of robust political debate which sometimes obscures the broad consensus upon which the Council's priorities are built. Scrutiny is adequate but does not provide sufficient challenge to the Executive. Workforce planning is underdeveloped. Arrangements for value for money are good. Financial, project and risk management arrangements are adequate and improving. Procurement is sound. IT is recognised by the Council as an area for urgent improvement.
- 57 Political leadership is effective but the political situation is finely balanced and relationships between councillors are sometimes confrontational reflecting the complexity of the local political scene. There is a broad consensus on the ambitions and priorities for the borough and examples of good cross-party and borough working. Councillors from outside the Labour group are involved in high profile roles within the cabinet and as champions for particular policy areas. Councillors champion effectively the needs of their areas through area management committees and other mechanisms. Partners appreciate the leadership of the Council. Effective leadership is contributing to the delivery of the shared ambitions for the borough.
- 58 Decision making is effective in supporting service delivery and improvement. Officers and councillors are clear about their roles and work well together. There is a shared understanding of their respective roles and there is a significant level of mutual trust and respect. The advent of new corporate management has allowed these relationships to be reinvigorated and there is more transparency through wider engagement between officers and councillors. There are some excellent working relationships between officers and councillors (particularly portfolio holders) within a sound ethical framework. A democratic commission has been established to improve further the Council's decision making. Councillor support is highly valued by service managers. The shared understanding of roles means there is a sound basis upon which the Council can build in pursuing its priorities.

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

- 59** Scrutiny is adequate. There are examples in community safety and transport where scrutiny panels have added significantly to the capacity of the Council to hold partners to account for their performance. But there are few other significant and recent examples where scrutiny has either contributed effectively to policy development or held the administration to account. Scrutiny panels are established to review areas such as housing for disabled people, domestic violence and substance abuse but some of these reviews have taken considerable periods of time and resources. The impact of reviews is not always clear although the housing for disabled people report has had a positive effect leading to an action plan to improve the service which is now being delivered. The investment made in scrutiny does not consistently deliver the outcomes that it should in terms of policy development and holding the Executive to account.
- 60** Councillor training is adequate. The Council has an established four-year councillor training and development programme which includes mentoring for senior members including the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Main Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Mentoring is highly valued by its recipients and has contributed to more effective advocacy for the borough by its councillors within the sub-region. Other training is focused primarily upon induction with ongoing updates to deal with legislative change. The effectiveness of training is evaluated and used to tailor training offered and promote take-up. The training activity ensures councillors have the opportunity to develop the skills to undertake their representative role effectively.
- 61** Managerial leadership is good. The new Chief Executive has had an immediate and positive impact upon the Council and its partners. EMT, extended EMT and the senior management group (comprised of the Council's Heads of Service) provide consistent and visible leadership. The work of the Chief Executive in engaging with partners is recognised and appreciated by them. Heads of Service are knowledgeable about Council priorities, enthusiastic to address them and form a key part of the capacity available to the Council to deliver its priorities. The valuing staff work stream established by the Chief Executive forms a key element in addressing staff concerns expressed in the most recent staff survey. Investment in leadership development for councillors and managers is now in place and a programme approved. Good managerial leadership is helping the Council to deliver its priorities.
- 62** Corporate management is making progress in the priority area of increasing the effectiveness of the Council's corporate working and the pace of work on this is increasing. Nine priority work streams have recently been established to address development areas identified through self-review and external assessment (including a recent peer review by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)). These include: making sure plans are supported by enough people and money; improving customer access; leadership, skills and capacity for councillors and staff; valuing staff; financial management – improving the long-term approach to operational and strategic planning; and information communications technology. Each project has clear terms of reference and objectives and the projects are overseen by a Programme Board comprised of the EMT and some Heads of Service. Officers are pursuing these projects with enthusiasm but it is too early to see any consistent outcomes from the work.

- 63 Access to services is adequate and improving. The Council is using a range of approaches to ensure that its services are accessible to all its diverse communities. These include: establishing joint teams with the PCT to provide adult health and social care; providing a call centre operating six days a week; setting up three one stop shops in Eston, Guisborough and Redcar; using a mobile one stop shop in other areas of the borough; and, exploiting IT, including web-conferencing, to let customers speak with council advisors and other organisations. The Council's actions are giving more of its residents an opportunity to access the services they need when they need them.
- 64 Workforce planning is underdeveloped. The Council is developing its workforce planning process and the HR Strategy and Workforce Development Plan are in draft. Directorate-based action plans are being developed to address specific service needs. Some joint workforce planning is developing in children and young people's services and older people's services, but it is still at an early stage. Without effective workforce planning, the Council cannot be sure that it has the staff resources to deliver its ambitions and priorities.
- 65 The Council is taking effective action to tackle high staff sickness levels. Absence management procedures have been tightened and a number of staff wellbeing initiatives have been introduced. These include on-site occupational health support in the areas of highest sickness absence and health screening for all staff. Sickness absence has fallen from 11.2 days per employee to 9.9 days, resulting in a saving of £190,000 per annum in staff cover. Action in this area reduces the cost and other impacts of sickness absence on the Council's delivery of its priorities.
- 66 The Council has a good corporate equality policy. Revised in April 2008, it makes clear commitments to equal opportunity for all service users and employees. It contains corporate and directorate level action plans. The Council recognises its legal obligations and has put in place systems to monitor progress with its own workforce and to assess the impact of existing and new policies and functions. But priorities for action are not clear and there are no arrangements for monitoring service delivery by equality strands (for example satisfaction with services as experienced by disabled people). The absence of both clear priorities and monitoring of them reduces the effectiveness of the policy in enhancing the Council's capacity to deliver its priorities.
- 67 The Council is making effective use of procurement to improve services and value for money. For example, the arrangements with a private sector contractor for highways maintenance has improved the responsiveness of the service and generated £300,000 per year saving in staff costs for the Council. The Council has used the private finance initiative (PFI) to deliver environmental, financial and community safety benefits from street lighting. The Council has also acted to end contracts with private companies which were failing to deliver anticipated benefits in a range of 'back office' functions. These are now being delivered in house. In some areas, such as adult care, progress is being made on developing commissioning capacity and skills in the Council and its partners.

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- 68 Partnership arrangements are mature and partnership working is good. The Council works well with private sector organisations in developing genuine partnership working. The work on establishing Renew Tees Valley is an example of a successful partnership approach to developing economic activity in emerging areas like renewable technologies. Engagement with the voluntary and community sector is effective generally and strong in particular areas such as the disabled community. The Council's commitment to community empowerment and engagement is recognised by partners but there is no strategic long-term approach to building community capacity in the borough; capacity varies considerably across organisations. Late decisions by the Council on some investment bids have impacted negatively on some aspects of partnership working but good partnership working is contributing effectively to the delivery of the priorities for the borough.
- 69 Financial capacity to support the delivery of priorities is adequate. The Council has a good track record in delivering financial efficiencies. Savings of £11 million have been made over the last three years against a national efficiency target of £8 million. This provides flexibility to enable the Council to redirect its resources to its priorities. Assessment of financial risks associated with policy initiatives and the medium term financial plan is underdeveloped and is being addressed through the corporate development projects. Extensive use is made of external funding sources. The Council performs well in the use of resources overall and in achieving value for money in particular. Focus on value for money (VFM) is good and is being developed further through a strategy and action plan which is being implemented by a corporate working group. This increasing focus on VFM and maximising financial resources mean the Council is in a sound position to deliver its priorities.
- 70 Project and risk management are adequate and improving. Both these areas are the subject of one of the corporate work streams. Arrangements in some areas work well but this is not consistently true across the Council as a whole. Leadership on risk management is good and officers have provided training and support in this area to other officers and councillors. The Council is taking effective action to improve key areas for the effective management of the improvement programme and corporate plan.
- 71 IT development capacity is weak and investment in this area has not delivered the benefits expected. The Council has recognised the problems and has taken steps to prioritise investment and improve project management and governance through one of the work streams in the corporate development programme. There are some examples where IT has been used to improve access to services but these are dependent upon the leadership of individual local service managers. Significant investment is planned to improve the project management of IT developments and to secure modern systems in key areas such as customer relationship management and performance management. The weakness in IT constrains the Council's ability to deliver its priorities.

Performance management

- 72** The Council is performing adequately in this area. There is a well structured and documented performance management framework currently in place which provides a golden thread from corporate priorities to individual staff objectives. The framework is driving improvements in some areas, but it is not used consistently. There is insufficient corporate challenge to overall performance and appraisal of individuals happens inconsistently. Appropriate plans are in place to improve performance management arrangements, including increasing the frequency of corporate performance meetings and implementing a new IT system.
- 73** The Council has a good track record of improving service performance. Since 2004/05 its improvement in a basket of performance indicators measured by the Audit Commission is in the top 25 per cent of councils nationally. Between 2005/06 and 2006/07 some 63 per cent of these indicators improved. Thirty eight per cent of the Council's performance indicators are now in the top quarter for councils nationally. This is significantly above the average of 30 per cent. Improvements in performance have been secured in a range of priority areas such as recycling, housing and road accident reduction. Councillors have contributed to this performance as Portfolio Holders, policy champions and members of scrutiny. This track record is a good foundation on which to build in planning for the delivery of the Council's ambitions and priorities.
- 74** Monitoring and review of performance enables the Council to stay on track but there is limited focus on constructive challenge and developing solutions to poor performance. A clear hierarchy, involving EMT, Cabinet and overview and scrutiny committees, is in place to review performance and facilitate open debate on a quarterly basis, but review cycles have been too infrequent. The Council is increasing their frequency to monthly. Actions plans are produced where performance indicators are not meeting their targets. These action plans are generally descriptive and mainly give more explanation about the reason for the underperformance rather than the actions and activities to be taken to improve performance. This makes it difficult to monitor whether actions are actually being taken to improve performance. Directorate Management Teams review performance on a monthly basis, although the links between this process and corporate quarterly monitoring or the raising of areas of concern lack clarity and reduce the effectiveness of this monitoring.

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- 75 Information about performance is produced on a regular basis for the Council and its partnerships but reporting is not consistently prioritised, or sufficiently analytical in evaluating performance. There are many detailed individual performance indicators presented in the quarterly corporate reporting. These are colour coded to highlight risks and included symbols to indicate direction of travel, but there are limited summaries and overall commentaries to help users understand the main implications as they relate to the key priorities of the Council and partnership. Performance targets for improvement are set for individual performance indicators generally over a three-year period. But it is not always clear how the numerous individual targets set relate to timeline for achieving the overall key priorities. The Council's performance management systems do not give consistent clarity on performance at a strategic level or help it to focus on key targets.
- 76 Service delivery plans, service plans and team plans contain financial information at a high level but lack sufficient detail. The impact of financial decisions on performance is considered in general terms as part of the annual budget setting process and when setting overall annual efficiency savings to be achieved. Financial decisions are not reflected consistently throughout the planning framework. This makes tracking investment in resources to improve performance in priority areas difficult and reduces the ability of councillors, officers and partners to see that investments are delivering the outcomes envisaged.
- 77 The staff appraisal arrangements are overly complicated and not routinely applied across the Council. The most recent staff survey reported that only 45 per cent of staff had a regular performance review, a reduction in 6 per cent from the previous survey. The existing appraisal system reviews the last 12 months performance, sets objectives for the next 12 months, and assesses job competencies and core competencies. Some managers and staff complete only parts of the process or combine some sections to make it more manageable. The Council does not know whether its appraisal system is applied fairly and the system does not help the Council to identify strengths and areas of development across the workforce.
- 78 The LSP's performance management arrangements operate effectively overall but its use of performance data in the four theme groups varies. There is a good level of challenge by partners and the Council is open about its performance. For example, during the last year partners particularly focused on performance of the shared targets for community safety. This led to a sustained focus on improving performance. Performance data mainly structured round the LAA targets is presented and available to the LSP, but its usage across the four theme groups varies; it is most effective in the safer and stronger communities theme. The lack of consistency in the use of data means that opportunities to improve performance are being lost.

- 79 The Council is open to external evaluation to help self awareness and identify areas for improvement. Performance reviews, inspection findings and independent reviews are used to drive improvements. Peer support is provided to other authorities, for example as part of Beacon Council status for waste and recycling and emergency planning and other initiatives such as the implementation of Single Status. This openness to external challenge and knowledge sharing is a sound foundation upon which the Council can take its improvement forward.
- 80 Consideration of the impacts of financial decisions and financial information on performance varies. Annual efficiency savings are considered in budget setting to ensure there is a full understanding of their potential affect on performance. During the year quarterly financial information covering revenue and capital budget monitoring is presented at the same time as quarterly performance information. However they are essentially two separate processes. There is a good focus on value for money on specific projects and as part of one off service reviews. However it is not an integral part of current service delivery plans, team or service plans. Benchmarking and unit cost information is not routinely used to drive improvements in services. Work is ongoing to develop a corporate basket of value for money (VFM) indicators to enable senior managers and members to fully explore the relationship between cost, performance and satisfaction in priority areas. Inconsistency in examining financial issues alongside performance undermines the effectiveness of the performance management framework.
- 81 Good use is made of area profile data to assess need and differentiate support across the area and this work is being extended into comprehensive sub-area profiles. The quality of engagement with people who use services and the opportunities for them to make a contribution to service improvement vary. There are good examples in adult social care, in children's services and in the Safer Streets Programme which encourages individual communities to take a lead role in the development of local road safety schemes. Plans are in place to improve the link between performance and user satisfaction with the introduction of a balanced score card.
- 82 Complaint systems are not yet fully integrated into performance management systems. Complaints recording systems are in place and information is reported quarterly to overview and scrutiny committees. Improvements are planned to develop reporting and trends analysis with the ability to track improvements made in response to complaints. The Council is missing the opportunity to integrate the learning from complaints into improving its performance.

What has been achieved?

- 83 The Council is performing well in this area. Together with its partners it has a clear understanding of the needs of the area and is working effectively to deliver actions to increase prosperity and the quality of life in the borough. The Council is particularly effective in working with business and Government to secure new inward investment to achieve its aims. In some parts of the borough deprivation levels remain high and gaps between these areas and the better performing parts of the borough are increasing in some cases.
- 84 Local ambitions and priorities are closely aligned with national ones. The six priority areas in the community strategy all closely reflect national priorities. The Council and its partners are focusing effort on regenerating parts of the borough that have been left behind economically by other areas. Key developments include new schools, new supported housing and new retail developments. Poor housing has been improved and unwanted housing demolished in some areas. There is a depth of civic pride and strong identification by many residents with the borough's heritage of mining, heavy engineering and chemical industries. The public art along the A66 is valued highly by local people. However, whilst some progress is evident to residents, the delays in getting improvement particularly in the range of shopping options in Eston and Redcar are causes of frustration and impact on the Council's reputation. Improvements are not being recognised by local people. The level of public satisfaction with the Council in the most recent survey is in the worst 25 per cent nationally. In a quality of life survey in 2005, 16 per cent of respondents thought that their neighbourhood had got better in the past three years while 36 per cent thought it had got worse.
- 85 The Council and its partners have made some progress over recent years in reducing the extent of deprivation in the borough as measured by the national index of multiple deprivation. In 2000 the borough was ranked at 32 out of 354 local authorities. In 2007 its ranking had improved by 18 places to 50. The concentration of deprivation also improved over the same period but has worsened again over the last three years. Changes in the position of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the borough reflect that trend too. In 2004, 19 were in the lowest 10 per cent nationally whereas in 2007 there were 20 in the same category. Three of these areas (Coatham, Kirkleatham and Eston) moved into being amongst the most deprived 3 per cent. The increase in the concentration of deprivation in the borough challenges the Council's and partners' aspirations to achieve a stronger and more cohesive borough.

- 86 There are good achievements in the priority areas of regeneration and economic development including good liaison with industry and business to secure inward investment. Achieving safer and stronger communities are priorities for the Council. Rates for some crimes have recently reduced but overall rates have increased since 2003/04. Health inequalities are not reducing either between the borough and the rest of the country and within the borough itself. Life expectancy for women has reduced. The Council and partners' approach to older people has not consistently gone beyond health and social care although these services are good. Outcomes for children and young people in Redcar and Cleveland are good.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 87 The Council has made good progress in its priorities for developing the borough's economy and regenerating its communities. It has made sound progress too in some aspects of delivering a high quality and sustainable living environment but public transport and road congestion remain problem areas.
- 88 Good progress has been made in regenerating the economy, although a number of challenges remain. Employment and economic activity rates have both increased at a rate which has closed the gap with the national averages and unemployment levels have fallen, most significantly in the most deprived areas such as Grangetown and South Bank. The Council has worked well with business partners to ensure that local people get access to new job opportunities through training and skills development supported by targeted initiatives such as Routes to Employment. LEGI funding is now being used to target business start-ups and support self-employment and social enterprise, particularly in most disadvantaged areas.
- 89 The Council and its partners understand clearly the significant challenges in reducing deprivation that they face. These include the need to attract and develop a more skilled workforce as the borough moves towards a more innovative and diverse economy, the need to develop the infrastructure to support small business, and the negative image of the borough which is resulting in declining tourism. The borough has improved from 44th most deprived borough in 2003 to 50th in 2007, although acute deprivation still exists in some communities. The Council has played an important part in attracting business and development into the borough through advocacy and planning support for major developments. It was instrumental in securing a logistics centre in the port for a major supermarket chain and the £2 billion fuel refinery which will begin construction shortly. LEGI funding is targeting the small business sector. Other developments such as that at Coatham Links aim to improve what the borough can offer in the way of leisure and recreation.

- 90 The Council has been successful in delivering initiatives to provide employment opportunities, particularly for the most disadvantaged groups. Eight hundred and thirty people participated in the Routes to Employment project, with 545 receiving training and 152 entering sustained employment. The project included a specific focus on the four most deprived wards in the borough, which resulted in 95 people from these wards entering sustained employment; one initiative, Tees Valley Works for Women, resulted in 25 women gaining qualifications, 12 entering sustained employment and three becoming self employed. Unemployment levels in each of the targeted wards have fallen during the course of the project.
- 91 The Council is making good use of LEGL funding to support initiatives to address the economic regeneration of the borough, with a particular focus on the most deprived areas. It is currently supporting 63 people to start their own businesses and providing advice, facilities and premises to another 106. It is supporting young people's enterprise by providing dedicated staff in three schools, with two businesses being piloted within Redcar Community College. Funding has been provided to acquire sites for an Enterprise Centre and Enterprise Shop, and potential sites for incubator units for new businesses are being investigated. The Council is supporting growth in this sector to reduce the labour market's dependence on the large employers within the borough.
- 92 There has been significant progress against housing priorities and the Council is working well with housing partners including the registered social landlord to which its own housing was transferred in 2002. The Council and its partners have been successful in addressing demand for new housing. Between 2004/05 and 2006/07 there were 898 new completions/conversions including 52 affordable units (although demand has been assessed as 55 units per annum). The Council is making good progress against national decent homes targets. The proportion of non decent homes fell from 32 per cent to 16 per cent between 2005 and 2007. Twenty eight private landlords (138 properties) are signed up to the Landlord Charter which sets out minimum standards for private rented accommodation. The Council has had a sustained focus with partners on ensuring the housing needs of the most vulnerable are met and there are around 100 units of housing for this group in the borough. Between 2005/06 and 2007/08, homelessness applications fell from 835 to 74; acceptances fell from 369 to 52; housing advice requests increased from 122 to 1,071; homelessness prevention cases increased from 51 to 588; households in temporary accommodation fell from 351 to 171; the use of bed and breakfast accommodation fell from 103 to 40. The work of the Council and its partners in this area is delivering better and more affordable homes for the people in the borough.

- 93** The Council is making good progress in addressing housing market failure through the regeneration programme in Greater Eston. Between 2006/07 and 2007/08 there have been 198 acquisitions; 249 demolitions and 77 relocations through the regeneration activity in Greater Eston. The Council has an agreed strategy to develop an overarching masterplan for the area as a whole which will strengthen the plans for regeneration. It has secured funding to continue its programme of acquisition, demolition and relocation to deal with an area of low quality, low demand housing in South Bank and, with partners, is progressing plans for redevelopment of the Low Grange Farm area which will include 900 new homes as well as health, leisure and retail facilities. Over the longer term, the Council has plans to package the cleared areas for redevelopment.
- 94** The Council is making good progress in waste management. It has achieved good levels of waste recycling which at 36 per cent is now in the top 25 per cent of performance nationally. Along with other Tees Valley authorities, the Council has recently revised the joint waste management strategy to take account of long-term priorities including waste minimisation. The Council is also using external funding to develop engagement with local communities to support delivery of the strategy. This includes recycling surgeries, presentations at mother and toddler groups, and the delivery of a recycling calendar to each household providing information and advice.
- 95** Access to public transport is poor for those in more remote areas. Poor public transport is a significant ongoing issue in the borough. The Council is working well with the local bus provider to preserve services on less commercially viable routes and supplementing this with its municipal bus service which uses education and social services vehicles to provide a service to remote communities at certain times of day, and the dial-a-ride service for people with mobility problems. The municipal bus service was launched in November 2007 and has had almost 1,500 passengers so far. The Council is benchmarking its costs against private subsidised services to ensure it provides value for money. The Council's actions are yet to improve significantly the poor public transport which prevents access to jobs and services particularly in rural communities in East Cleveland.
- 96** The Council and its partners have introduced a range of initiatives which have improved the quality of the street environment. Targeted environmental 'blitz' campaigns and free bulky waste collections have removed significant volumes of waste from the borough's streets. 'Operation Eco' involves regular environmental events, along with police-led Weeks of Action which include environmental clean-ups as well as enforcement and community safety activities. This commitment to action is a sound base upon which to build in securing further improvements.

- 97 The Council is making good use of its planning powers to ensure the environmental sustainability of new developments. It has planning policies on construction, renewable energy and sustainable design and has run a design award scheme for the last eight years to support sustainable development. These policies are influencing the nature of major developments including the Health Village, Low Grange Farm and the Eco Park, where offices are to be made from recycled shipping containers. It is also managing the environmental impacts of local industry. It is meeting EC standards for bathing water and air quality. The Council has also carried out sustainability appraisals for each settlement in the borough to direct local planning priorities.
- 98 The Council has made some early progress to manage the impacts of climate change, although more action is required. Significant progress has been made in reducing the Council's own CO2 emissions, although borough-wide levels remain high. Plans to extend Teesport to increase shipping volumes will reduce the number of vehicles on the roads across the UK. The Tees Valley Metro system to improve rail links across the region is an important part of the multi area agreement being developed by the Tees Valley councils but this is at an early planning stage. The ongoing replacement of street lighting across the borough is improving energy efficiency and reducing light pollution. A combined heat and power system is being introduced as part of the Coatham Links development. Traffic volumes have increased in recent years, and the Council is taking action to encourage the use of alternatives to the car. Green travel plans have been introduced in all schools and cycling has increased by 167 per cent since 2001/02.
- 99 The Council has a focus on the transport needs for the most disadvantaged. Following feedback from a local support group for people with disabilities, the Council has recently changed the service criteria for the Dial-a-Ride service which provides a service to those with mobility problems to ensure a clearer focus on priority 'lifeline' services. It is also looking to develop the service to cater for young people in the more rural areas. The Council's actions in the area aim to ensure that all communities can benefit from the planned economic growth.

Safer and stronger communities

- 100 The Council is making some progress in its priority areas of achieving safer and stronger communities. Some aspects of people's perception of anti-social behaviour have reduced since 2003/04 particularly for public drunkenness, burned out and abandoned cars, vandalism and people dealing and using drugs. Recent reductions have been achieved in the priority areas of arson, anti-social behaviour and burglary. Accident rates have fallen and the borough (along with the other Tees Valley councils) has Beacon Status for emergency planning. Eighty one per cent of people identify very or fairly strongly with their neighbourhood but only, 68 per cent, identify with the borough as a whole.

- 101** Rates for some crimes have reduced recently but overall rates have increased since 2003/04. The total crime rate fell by one per 1,000 population between 2005/06 and 2006/07 to 77.3 per 1,000 population. The latest unaudited data for 2007/08 shows continued falls in 9 of the 13 crime categories. Rates increased marginally (by less than 1.5 per cent) for violence and vehicle interference but more significantly for 'other theft' (11.3 per cent) and 'other crime' (23.9 per cent). The largest categories by numbers of crime are: criminal damage; 'other theft'; and violence. The rise in total crime since 2003/04 threatens the borough's achievement of the target for crime reduction in the LAA.
- 102** Partnership working on community safety by the Council and others is effective. The Safer Communities Partnership theme board provides good oversight of activities on this issue. These are a combination of enforcement, community engagement and support. Area committees play an important role in giving local people the chance to make their voices heard on issues facing their areas. Good partnership working enhances the partnership's ability to achieve its targets.
- 103** The Council focuses well on the needs for the most disadvantaged. Targeted action has been taken to address community safety issues in the most deprived areas of the borough. This includes a move to ward-based policing supported by the Council's warden service and early implementation of street lighting improvements in targeted areas to reduce fear of crime. Neighbourhood Agreements have been introduced in two housing estates. These define the standards of service expected by each partner organisation and, on one estate, Coast and Country Housing have re-profiled the estate, including some demolition, to address community safety concerns of local people. Joint Action Groups take a problem solving approach to local issues and participate in a range of diversionary activities for those at greatest risk, for example young people coming out of drug treatment programmes.
- 104** Investment by the Council is contributing to the delivery of its strategy to improve community safety. New CCTV investment means pictures can be sent direct to the police call centre which can direct resources to incidents and increase the police speed of response. Investment is from the Council (£500,000) and One North East, with accommodation supplied by Cleveland Police. The Council has invested significantly in the community protection team with officers supporting the police across the borough. The Council's investment is contributing to the achievement of its priorities for making the borough a safer place.
- 105** The Council's use of mixed neighbourhood teams to support joint problem solving in anti-social behaviour is sound. Four joint action groups with a police inspector chairing each one are in place. Neighbourhood policing was introduced early in the borough; the Council was involved in its development particularly to tackle environmental issues. Community development officers feed intelligence to the action groups. They are able to pick up local issues and report issues to the appropriate body such as the Council or the police, for example a garage parking cars on a grass verge causing a nuisance in the area. The matter was resolved through planning enforcement by the Council. Good local intelligence from the neighbourhood teams ensures that the police and Council are able to react quickly in an appropriate way to resolve issues.

- 106 Community safety support in a range of areas such as drug advice is effective. Support is provided by the Council together with other partners including local communities. The Council worked with local residents, Coast and Country Housing, the police, the PCT and Connexions to develop a 'community house' where local residents can access key services, including advice on drugs, teenage pregnancies. The facility is now run by the community. This approach and flexibility enables the Council to maximise the capacity of the borough to deliver its safer communities priorities.
- 107 Road safety is improving through the work of the Council and its partners. It works with local communities through the area committee system to deliver local 'safer streets' projects including traffic calming measures and other road safety features. It also works with the police to target specific high risk groups such as young drivers. As a result, road casualties have reduced by 40 per cent.
- 108 The Council has engaged a wide range of partners and community organisations to inform its approach to community cohesion. The partnership which directs the cohesion and integration work within the borough includes key public service agencies and a wide range of borough and neighbourhood based community organisations. These ensure that the council's approach to cohesion is informed by key agencies and the local community.
- 109 The Council works well with community and voluntary groups supporting skills development in a number of areas. The community skills programme has supported 174 community-based organisations to develop skills such as project management, minute taking and first aid, as well as formal NVQ qualifications. Targets for 2007/08, which were linked to NRF funding, were exceeded, with 822 people receiving training against a target of 200; 232 achieved formal qualifications against a target of 50. Groups supported included disabled groups, older people's groups and younger people's groups. Issues addressed included disability awareness and drugs awareness.

Healthier communities

- 110 Improving the health and wellbeing of the population and reducing health inequalities is a key priority of the Council. Together with its partners it is taking action to develop services and address attitudes and behaviours in a range of areas to achieve this objective. But these have yet to reduce health inequality either between the borough and the rest of the country or within the borough itself.

- 111** Partners understand clearly the scale of the health challenges facing the borough but this has not been integrated into a strategy for the health and wellbeing of the population. Consultation on this strategy has been completed but its finalisation has awaited the appointment of a Director of Public Health specifically covering the borough - the previous arrangement was a joint appointment with Middlesbrough. There is considerable data available to inform this strategy from the work of the Health Theme Board of the LSP and the Council's relations with the PCT's commissioning and provider functions are good. A senior officer of the Council sits on the Board of the PCT's provider arm. The shared understanding of the issues is a strength upon which the finalisation and implementation of the strategy can build.
- 112** Indicators of the overall health of people in the borough are worse in almost all cases than the national position despite improvements in some areas. The latest health profile for the borough produced by the Department of Health contains figures for 25 health indicators. In all but five the borough does significantly worse than the England average. In key areas of lifestyle such as smoking, binge drinking, eating healthily and obesity the borough performs poorly. Suicide amongst men aged from 20 to 29 has a significant impact on life expectancy and partners are working closely on identifying actions from case reviews but this has yet to have an impact on this area. Some work by the Council and its partners is having an impact for example on circulatory disease and cancer where rates have improved. A strategy to tackle alcohol abuse is under development. The Council has also provided an example to other employers in the borough by providing free health checks at work in a partnership with the PCT. Around 30 per cent of staff were found to have undiagnosed high blood pressure and 15 per cent had an excessive risk of developing coronary heart disease. In the absence of an overall health and wellbeing strategy neither the Council nor its partners can be sure that its actions are effectively targeting the drivers of poor health.
- 113** Life expectancy in the borough for both men and women is increasing but varies significantly across the borough and on average remains below the national figures. Between 1996-1998 and 2004-2006 male life expectancy in the borough increased by 2.6 years (from 73.4 to 76 years). The national increase in the same period was 2.5 years. The gap between the borough and the national average reduced by 0.1 years. The position for women is less positive. Over the same period the gap for women actually increased by 0.7 years. Women in the borough can expect to live 80.5 years against a national average of 81.6. For both men and women there are significant differences in life expectancy across the borough. A man from Eston or Grangetown can expect to live ten years less than a man from Hutton. A woman from South Bank can expect to live 13 years less than a woman from St Germain's.

- 114 The use of culture in its widest sense as part of an overall strategy for improving health is underdeveloped. A draft culture strategy is being consulted upon and is expected to be finalised later in 2008. It contains a vision for culture in the borough and its relevance to a number of priority areas beyond health and wellbeing, including regeneration and community safety for example. The quality of the leisure centres owned by the Council but managed by an independent Trust varies. Action has been taken to promote physical activity including a borough half-marathon, cycling and walking opportunities in the borough's parks and green spaces. There has been little evaluation of the health impacts of these and other initiatives such as the prescription for health project with the PCT. The lack of an overall strategy framework linking health and culture means that the Council and its partners do not know if their actions on culture are addressing the real needs of residents.
- 115 The Council and its partners have taken some action to improve access to health services for those at risk from disadvantage but this is happening outside a strategy in this area. Some services such as support for pregnant teenagers and sexual health are provided in mobile facilities. Joint teams of professionals from the Council and PCT have been established in two areas to focus on supporting those living with a long term condition. These provide a single point of contact for these clients and have streamlined access to a range of services. A third team is planned and will be established after an evaluation of the operation of the first two teams. Health visitor resources have been re-directed to areas of the borough with the greatest need. Plans are in place to enhance primary care facilities in one of the most deprived areas of the borough through the creation of a Health Village in Eston which will bring six GPs together with other services. These actions help ensure that some of the needs of those most at risk of disadvantage are being addressed.

Older people

- 116 The Council and partners' approach to older people (those over 50 years of age) has not gone consistently beyond health and social care. The Council has used specific media campaigns to provide information about healthier lifestyles and well being and there is some meaningful engagement with older people and their representative groups on issues of concern to them. Health and social care services are well-regarded by users and the older peoples' champion is providing effective leadership on this issue within the borough.
- 117 The Council is not consistently addressing the wider needs of older people. Consultation has only just begun on the older people's strategy. The consultation explicitly aims to move discussions with older people on to broader territory than health and social care. Councillors, officers and partners are aware of the seven dimensions of wellbeing and independence and the development of the strategy is planned to have regard to these. Completion of the strategy is planned for late 2008. The absence of a strategy means that the Council and its partners cannot be sure that their actions will address the needs and preferences of older people and help them to live actively as they grow older.

- 118** The Council and its partners are performing well in supporting the independence of older people. The proportion of older people and disabled people helped to live independently is high, and there is an above average level of provision of intensive home care to sustain the independence of older people. Partnership working with housing organisations is effective and leading to increasing numbers of houses for people with special needs becoming available. An initial contact service provides support to individuals leaving hospital and helps them to maintain their independence, achieving a 98 per cent success rate. Rapid progress has been made in direct payments from four in 2002/03 to 400 in 2007/08. Integrated teams of Council and PCT staff provide joined up access to social work, therapy and nursing services. The integrated approach to service provision and support is improving the lives of many older people who use health and social care services in the borough.
- 119** Engagement with older people is effective in some service areas such as social care and libraries and the Council's Older People's Champion is providing good political leadership to drive the agenda for older people in the borough. But engagement happens outside of an overarching strategic framework. The Older People's Champion is very active with older people in the borough and is actively championing the development of the new older people's strategy with them. Area management teams provide local support and advice to a range of older people's groups and service settings. These activities have included presentations on community safety and transport. A range of 'friends of ...' groups are also supported and provide their input into the development of policy and services in areas such as cemeteries, libraries and parks. The Council is using all this engagement to develop its plans for taking its work with beyond health and social care.
- 120** The Council is working to increase the take up of benefits by older people. The Older People's Champion is active in working to encourage people to take up benefits making sure that they understand that these are not charity but entitlements. The Council's Welfare Rights Service and its Campaigns Manager also support greater take up of entitlements and can point to numerous cases where its action has helped increase individual's income. In one case the increase was almost £173 per week for one couple. Work to support entitlement take up can increase the economic wellbeing of older people and improve their overall quality of life.

Children and young people

- 121** Outcomes for children and young people in Redcar and Cleveland are good. Many are better than those achieved in similar areas and others show improvement. Although there are health inequalities across the borough, outcomes have significantly improved in targeted priority areas such as sexual health and substance misuse. The majority of children and young people are provided with a safe environment and safeguarding outcomes are mainly good. There is a strong track record of improvement in education and performance is above that of statistical neighbours in many respects. The gap between outcomes for the most vulnerable and those for most children is narrowing.

- 122** Service management in Redcar and Cleveland is adequate. Effective leadership is provided by senior officers and the lead member for children's services, and there are strengths in operational workforce capacity and partnership working. However, until recently partnership working at a strategic level has been less well developed and key decision making on issues such as joint commissioning and workforce strategy has been slow. This is due, in part, to inconsistency in representation resulting from reorganisations and recruitment to key posts. The ambitions of the Council are based on good engagement with children and young people and key stakeholders and are good. There are some good examples of multi-agency, operational action plans and an effective focus on preventative services. However there are some planning inconsistencies in the priorities at an operational level and those set at a strategic level. Performance management is developing although it is not yet sufficiently aligned to the key priorities. Value for money is adequate overall.
- 123** The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Active and healthy lifestyles are promoted through initiatives such as free access to swimming, sports coaching, healthy eating schemes and the Healthy Schools Programme. There are good examples of targeted services for vulnerable young people including sexual health, substance misuse, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and specific support for young people involved with the Youth Offending Team (YOT). The teenage conception rate, although higher than the national figure, has declined at a faster rate and Chlamydia screening is slightly above the national average. The number of young people in treatment for substance misuse has increased significantly with the development of a dedicated treatment facility. The dedicated service for looked after children provides good support with immediate access and support for foster carers and residential workers. The health needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well served through effective partnership working in localities.
- 124** Children and young people appear safe and arrangements to ensure this are good. Children say they generally feel safe but some indicated that they feel more could be done to disperse trouble makers in their communities. Effective road safety measures have resulted in a reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured on the roads. Schools have sound systems in place to ensure the safety of young people and information and advice to parents on risks to safety is good. The Council works effectively with its partners to provide early intervention and support to vulnerable families; action taken to tackle domestic violence is effective. Threshold criteria for making safeguarding referrals are consistently applied and the Access Team provide a good service and valued advice. The social care service has reviewed quality assurance systems to bring about improvement in the quality of assessments. However inconsistencies remain in the quality of assessments and reviews and in some social work practice.

- 125** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. Provision and outcomes for children in the Foundation Stage are good and most pupils continue to make good progress through primary school. Secondary school performance has improved since 2004, particularly at key stage 3, but the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE is below that of statistical neighbours. The authority makes effective use of high quality data provided through its statistics team and support to schools and pupil groups is well targeted to need. Attendance is in line with similar authorities and there are below average exclusions. The clear focus on vulnerable children and young people is continuing to improve provision for them. Looked after children achieve well in gaining at least one GCSE pass. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make at least satisfactory progress and those with statements of special educational need make more rapid progress. Provision for young people accessing education other than at schools (EOTAS) is good and effectively personalised to meet individual needs.
- 126** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Young people are effectively involved in planning and evaluating specific projects and provision within the youth service, schools and the care system. Options are rightly being considered to involve them routinely at a more strategic level. Support is given to encourage children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children from different ethnic groups to take part. Looked after children have access to an independent advocacy service and participation in reviews is high, at 97.3 per cent. Preventative strategies to reduce antisocial behaviour are reducing serious antisocial behaviour and the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system although numbers remain higher than in similar areas.
- 127** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic wellbeing is good. Partners, including schools, colleges and the Learning and Skills Council collaborate well in implementing the 14 to 19 strategy. Strategies to reduce the high number of young people not in education, employment or training are leading to a declining trend but the rate remains above the national average. The youth service makes a good contribution helping young people make gains in their personal and social development and acquire useful skills for life and employment. Support for care leavers is excellent. The number living in suitable accommodation and those accessing education, employment and training is at a level higher than statistical neighbours and the England average. Additional support for families with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been provided through neighbourhood renewal funding, helping families to access benefits available to them.

- 128** The capacity of Council services to improve is good. Organisational change and recent recruitment to key posts has slowed decision making on some key strategies but there is a good track record of improvement based on a firm foundation of good operational staff working effectively across agencies. Stakeholders and partners are committed and enthusiastic. Effective leadership by senior officers and the lead member for children's services and education is now in place to focus on and co-ordinate key priorities. Plans are in place to strengthen performance management.

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 Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 12 to 26 May 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.