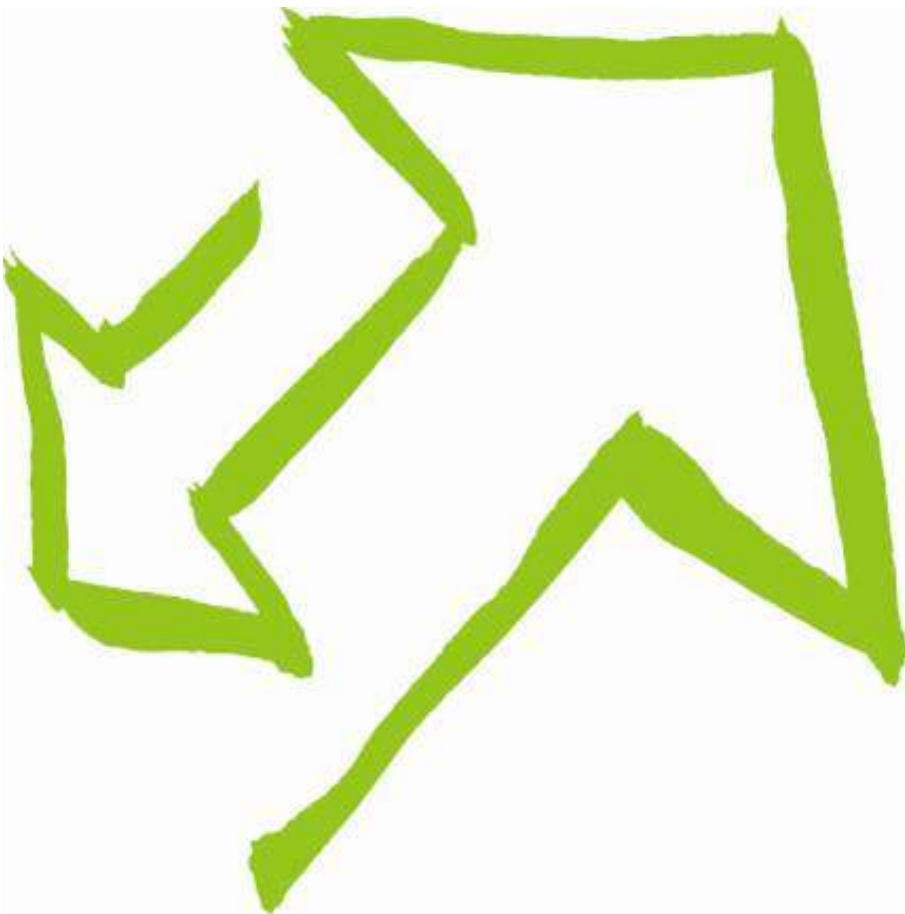


Corporate Assessment

City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
January 2009



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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). For Wakefield the JAR took place in advance of the corporate assessment. The Council's achievements in relation to children and young people are assessed using the evidence provided from the Annual Performance Assessment from Ofsted which covers all the Council's children services. In addition, examples of outcomes and activity, which are relevant to the other themes, are considered within the corporate assessment.

Executive summary

- 4 Wakefield Council is performing well. Together with its partners, it has clear ambitions for the district, based on a good understanding of community needs. There is an explicit focus on improving the quality of life for both individuals and their communities. Major regeneration schemes are aimed at making the environment more sustainable and stimulating the local economy. The Council provides strong community leadership. The calibre of councillors and staff is good. Despite the financial constraints on the Council, most of the services provided by the Council are of a good quality. Crime is reducing, the cleanliness of the area is improving and employment is rising. These are all areas of key importance to the community. Key areas that are proving difficult to improve are the fear of crime and the health of the community. In particular, the Council and its partners have struggled to reduce health inequalities; a legacy of the district's industrial heritage.
- 5 Ambitions for the district are clear and underpinned by a good knowledge of local need. The Council undertakes much meaningful consultation and has generally communicated its plans well to local people. However, some of its strategic plans lack long term targets. Medium term plans, such as the Corporate Plan and Cultural Strategy, do not include enough milestone targets to allow citizens to track progress against objectives. Overall, the Council is ambitious to improve quality of life in the area.
- 6 The Council's community leadership is strong at regional, district and ward level. The Council engages well with Yorkshire Forward and the Regional Assembly. As the chair of the Regional Assembly, the Leader is able to influence the regional agenda. At district and ward level, the Council engages effectively with the community to understand its needs and seeks to meet them. In particular, three neighbourhood management pilots are improving the quality of life for people in some of the most deprived areas.
- 7 The political and managerial leadership of the Council is effective. The Leader and the new Chief Executive work well together. While the Leader provides a clear vision for the district, the Chief Executive focuses on what is needed to deliver that vision. Senior councillors and managers are of a good calibre and work together effectively. Staff morale is high.
- 8 Partnership working in the district is good. The Council leads Wakefield Together, the Local Strategic Partnership, effectively. The Partnership has a clear and appropriate focus on delivery. Relations between the partners are highly effective. The Council works well with a range of partners, including the Police, the Primary Care Trust, developers, Wakefield First and the voluntary and community sector. It also works well with organisations, such as its major software provider, to provide efficient and effective services. Plans for a more wide ranging approach to commissioning services are well-conceived. However, success depends on good coordination and ensuring there is enough senior management capacity to drive plans forward. Overall, partnerships help to increase the capacity of the Council to deliver its ambitions.

Executive summary

- 9 The Council provides good value for money. In the last two years it has achieved £17.2 million in efficiency savings over the last three years. These savings have been used to fund priority areas, such as waste management and social care. Further savings are being sought through a value for money assessment of all services and the Worksmart programme which uses technology and new techniques to increase the efficiency of services. The Council is also looking at alternative forms of service delivery with partners. These initiatives are seeking to continue to improve services at the same time as reducing costs.
- 10 The capacity of the Council is good. Effective use is made of ICT, staff, assets and procurement to maximise capacity. Risk management of services and large projects is good. The main constraint on the Council is the level of financial resources available to it. However, through effective financial management, it has been able to deliver its key priorities to date, including an ambitious regeneration programme. The Council realises that it will only be able to achieve its ambitions in the future if there are changes in the way that services are delivered. This will stretch the Council's current capacity.
- 11 The Council performs well in the way that it meets the needs of diversity in the community. This is based on good engagement with all groups, including those which are made vulnerable by their circumstances. The Council has achieved level 3 of the Equality Standard. However, its workforce is not representative of its local population. This is particularly the case for black and minority ethnic (BME) staff. Although the Council is aware of this, it has not yet secured change.
- 12 Performance management is good. It is based on a robust framework, with a performance culture that extends throughout the Council to front line staff. Councillors, managers and staff use performance information, including benchmarking against high performers, to drive continuous improvement. Last year, 68 per cent of performance indicators improved. The bulk of these were in priority areas. Effective risk and financial management is in place. However, performance, financial and risk management arrangements are not well integrated at the corporate level, which makes it difficult for decision-makers to take a holistic view of service performance. Performance management is good at Board level within Wakefield Together. Work is underway to strengthen the links between the thematic partnerships. Overall, good performance management is delivering continuing improvement.
- 13 The Council has delivered well against its priorities. It has reduced crime, attracted significant inward investment, supported job creation, improved educational attainment, dealt with homelessness effectively and improved services for older people. However, it has not met all its targets on reducing the fear of crime and health inequalities.

Areas for improvement

- 14 The Council has clear ambitions. However, its long term objectives are not always supported by measurable targets. While the long term objectives of the Community Strategy are translated into short term targets and milestones in the LAA, not all strategies, such as the Corporate Plan and Cultural Strategy, contain enough medium term milestones to assist citizens in assessing what the Council has achieved. The Council should establish measurable targets and milestones and monitor its progress routinely.
- 15 The Council is committed to improving the efficiency and quality of services. As part of this commitment, it is considering a more wide ranging approach to commissioning services. To achieve this, the Council should ensure that it coordinates delivery arrangements and that it has sufficient capacity at senior management level.
- 16 The Council's workforce is not representative of the local community. This is particularly the case for the BME and disabled communities. The Council should put in place ways of making its workforce more representative of its local community.
- 17 The Council has effective separate risk, performance and financial management systems in place. These work well at service and directorate level. The next stage of the development of these systems is fully integrating them at the corporate and operational levels. The Council should ensure that risk, performance and financial management are integrated at the corporate level.
- 18 The Partnership's strategy for addressing health inequalities is still developing and because of this, does not currently include clear milestones. Working with partners, the Council should ensure that it sets explicit targets and monitors achievement robustly.

Summary of assessment scores

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

**** Rules for determining the overall Corporate Assessment score**

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

Context

The locality

- 19** Wakefield is a metropolitan district in West Yorkshire. Over two thirds of the district is open countryside. Wakefield City is the largest urban centre. There are smaller concentrations of population in the Five Towns in the north of the district (Castleford, Knottingley, Featherstone, Normanton and Pontefract), in the west (Ossett and Horbury), and in the south east (Hemsworth and South Elmsall). Each of these settlements has its own distinctive character. The district has a rich cultural heritage with a range of tourist attractions such as Pontefract Castle, the National Coal Mining Museum, the Yorkshire sculpture park and the Xscape entertainment complex in Castleford. Wakefield is also part of the 'Rhubarb Triangle'; a crop grown in the area since the Middle Ages.
- 20** The population currently stands at 322,400. It has grown by 2 per cent since 2001 and a further 4 per cent increase is predicted by 2012. The proportion of ethnic minorities in the community is almost 5.5 per cent; a significant increase from 3.4 per cent in 2005. The area has also seen a growing migrant population from eastern Europe, particularly Poland. The age profile of the population is also changing. In 2001, 33 per cent were aged 50 or over. This figure is predicted to rise to over 40 per cent by 2021.
- 21** The district has a long history of coal mining, particularly around Castleford, Featherstone and South Elmsall. The decline of the mining industry in the 1980s and 1990s meant not only job losses but also a weakening of the area's social infrastructure. It left a skills mismatch in the workforce and a legacy of ill-health. However, in recent years, Wakefield's economy has grown and is now 35th largest of the 408 local authorities in the country. Some pockets of worklessness remain but overall, at 2.7 per cent, unemployment in Wakefield is lower than the regional average of 2.9 per cent. Service sector industries such as retail and leisure dominate the local economy and represent 82 per cent of total employment in the district. Although educational attainment at GCSE has improved recently, the area has a high proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).
- 22** Some pockets of severe deprivation remain, particularly in the former mining districts. The area has a higher than average population of people who describe themselves as feeling in 'poor health' and mortality rates lag behind national averages in terms of circulatory diseases and cancers. There are also relatively high levels of teenage conception, obesity and smoking and substance misuse. Wakefield PCT is designated by the government as a Spearhead PCT with targets to improve performance on life expectancy, cancer, heart disease, stroke and related diseases by 2010.
- 23** Wakefield and District Housing (WDH) took over responsibility for over 31,000 properties from the Council in 2005, making it the largest single housing stock transfer organisation in the country.

The Council

- 24 Wakefield Council has 63 Councillors of whom 32 are Labour, 23 Conservative, six Independent and two Liberal Democrats. The Labour party has held control of the Council since 1974. The current Labour Leader has been in the role since 1998.
- 25 The Cabinet has seven Labour members. As well as the Leader, there are portfolio holders for Adults and Health; Children and Young People; Community Safety and Cohesion; Corporate Services; Environment; and Regeneration, Culture and Sport.
- 26 The overview and scrutiny function consists of five thematic committees: Crime and Community Safety; Lifelong Learning; Liveability; Local Economy; and Social Care and Health. In addition to the five formal committees, there is a Scrutiny Cross-Committee Working Group, which consists of members from across the five committees and looks at corporate and customer-focused topics. Three of the scrutiny committees have a Labour chair; one a Conservative and one a Liberal Democrat.
- 27 The Council is organised into five directorates: Corporate Services; Family Services; Safer and Stronger Communities; Regeneration, Culture and Sport; and Improvement and Partnerships. The present Chief Executive took up her post in July 2008.
- 28 The Local Strategic Partnership, Wakefield Together, was established in 2002. Its Board is chaired by the Leader of the Council. Reporting to the Board, there are thematic partnerships responsible for Healthier Communities; Safe and Stronger Communities; and Skills Enterprise and Work. Wakefield Together produced its first community strategy in 2003, which it updated in 2007 as 'Developing Knowledge Communities'. The partners' first Local Area Agreement (LAA) 'Neighbourhoods and Families' was established in 2006 and has recently been updated. As part of the LAA, the partners are piloting neighbourhood management in three areas: Agbrigg & Belle Vue; Kinsley & Fitzwilliam; and Airedale & Ferry Fryston.
- 29 The revenue budget for 2008/09 is some £248 million. The Capital Programme is £95 million. The council tax is set at £1,209 for a Band D property.

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

Ambition

- 30** The Council performs well in this area. A clear and challenging vision for Wakefield is based on a good understanding of local needs. Ambitions are shared, understood and supported by local people and partners. Extensive consultation, engagement and involvement mean that ambitions meet the needs of diverse communities. It is not always clear to some stakeholders what changes as a result of this engagement. The Council is responding well to a highly challenging legacy of industrial decline. The ambition and priorities are communicated clearly and understood by all stakeholders. Short term targets are clear but long term targets are not always in place. Strong, visible community leadership drives support for the ambition and priorities and collaboration around delivery.
- 31** Wakefield Together has an inclusive vision that reflects the issues and challenges facing the district. The 25-year vision is high level and lacks some long term targets. The vision focuses on the district as a place; moving forward, motivated by pride and heritage; where people look after themselves and each other so they are safe and healthy, having the skills and confidence to take more control over their lives; with places that are attractive to live, learn, work and invest in and where diverse towns and villages work together to promote the well being of the whole of the district; and where together with the younger people of the district, we will ensure the work we do now stands the test of time. This addresses the legacy of health inequalities and low skills levels in the district. Overall the vision is clear but, without long term targets in all areas it is difficult to test its realism.
- 32** The Council is strongly focused on improving the social and economic development of its communities. Both the LAA and the Multi-Area Agreement (MAA) on skills and transport- which the Council was actively involved in developing and directly benefits from - are clearly based on improving the skills of local people. Similarly, the neighbourhood management pilots have led to improvements. These include local employment opportunities, educational attainment, quality of housing, and reductions in some types of crime and health inequalities. This is a good basis for improving the quality of life for citizens.

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

- 33** The Sustainable Community Strategy is based on a robust analysis of intelligence, demographics, and community need. Wakefield Together has refreshed the first ambitious community strategy for the area, which spanned the period 2003-2006, with its second strategy, Developing Knowledge Communities 2007-2010. Three outward facing priorities underpin the 25-year vision. These are: Skills, enterprise and work; Safer and stronger communities; and Healthier Communities. These priorities are carried through to the Council's Corporate Plan along with an internal priority - Organisational capacity and transformation. The Council's plans have a strong focus on local needs.
- 34** The Council's ambitions and priorities for the area are strongly based on the views of citizens including the most vulnerable and at risk of disadvantage. The Council uses a wide range of mechanisms to inform its understanding. These include residents' forums such as Wakefield Speaks, Cabinet Listen, the Citizens Panel and engagement at ward level by councillors. Views of hard to reach or vulnerable groups are elicited through mechanisms such as the BME Women's Network, the BME Forum and the Inter-Faith Group. The Council was awarded Beacon Status for its work on positively engaging with over 6,000 young people. However, it is not always clear to all consultees what has changed as a result of the engagement that the Council undertakes. Overall, the Council's plans reflect the views of local people.
- 35** A thorough approach to intelligence gathering has led to a deep understanding of the problems and needs of all groups within and across communities. The Council routinely shares the results of consultation and knowledge with partners to ensure stronger, joint analysis. For example, the Council and NHS Wakefield have developed a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment of the area to drive health ambitions and priorities in Wakefield. A joint Partnership Information and Intelligence Group has been developed which provides a robust framework for sharing data and intelligence.
- 36** There are challenging, realistic and achievable medium-term targets in the LAA and Sustainable Community Strategy, and in plans covering three pilot neighbourhood management areas. Challenging medium term targets include; improving health by narrowing the gap in life expectancy by 10 per cent by 2010, improving housing beyond the decent homes standard through the Wakefield Standard by 2012 and increasing recycling to 55 per cent by 2015. Ambitions address what is important for the district and reflect the needs of diverse communities in the area.
- 37** The Council is highly effective at providing community leadership - at city region, district and ward level. It plays a strong role in regional and sub-regional partnerships on regeneration, transport and spatial planning. The Leader is chair of the Regional Assembly and a board member of the regional Learning and Skills Council. The Council has also secured substantial inward investment from Yorkshire Forward for regeneration projects and secured £32 million of investment from the Regional Housing Board to build new social housing.

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

- 38** Wakefield Together is strongly focused on delivery. The partnership arrangements are robust with clear governance and accountability arrangements. The Leader provides strong and visible leadership, particularly with the aim of regenerating the district and narrowing inequalities. Wakefield Together is underpinned by three thematic partnerships; Safer and Stronger, Skills, Enterprise and Work, and Healthier Communities. They own priority areas of the Sustainable Community Strategy and of the LAA, with Wakefield Together providing the overarching strategic direction for the area.
- 39** Councillors provide strong and effective leadership within their communities. They have a firm focus on bringing local people together and making things happen. In practical terms, this includes supporting community associations, asking people to get involved and supporting them when they do. Three neighbourhood management pilots were designed to give local people greater influence on decisions that affect them and to join up service delivery. The pilots have been very successful in improving service delivery, particularly in housing and employment opportunities for local people.
- 40** The Council has been successful in ensuring communities, businesses, partners and staff understand and own the ambitions and priorities. Councillors are enthusiastic about, and have ownership of, the Council's ambitions and priorities. Staff and other stakeholders understand and strongly support the ambitions for the area. These have been cascaded through a variety of routes including managers, team briefing, the intranet and newsletters. A wide range of communication mechanisms have been effectively used including the Wakefield Speaks, Cabinet Listens, Question Time, Students Speaks, and The Citizen, the Council's award winning free magazine for residents. Stakeholders have a strong belief in the Council's commitment to action and promises to local people are being delivered.

Prioritisation

- 41** The Council is performing well in this area. The Council's priorities for the area are made explicit in the Sustainable Community Strategy. As well as taking into account national issues such as health improvement and crime reduction, the priorities emphasise local needs such as lack of skills and promoting local businesses. These priorities are reflected in the challenging targets of the new LAA. Some key strategies lack specific measures and SMART targets. Overall, there are clear plans for delivering the Council's priorities.
- 42** There is clear and effective linkage between the priorities of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Council's Corporate Plan 2008-2011. The Strategic Priorities are delivered through 29 Corporate Improvement Priorities (CIPs), which are set out in the Corporate Plan. Each CIP contains high level targets, but there are no milestones to measure progress on the journey. Some CIPs include specific measures which are achievable and time based. Others are not SMART. This makes it difficult for external audiences to assess progress.

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

- 43 The Council's business planning cycle provides effective links between the Council's key strategies, other strategic plans (such as Local Development Framework, Cultural Strategy, Children and Young People's Plan and Workforce Development Plan) and to its delivery mechanisms (Service Plans, team plans, individual objectives and personal development plans). It is clear how each strategy contributes to the Council's overall priorities. The Council and its partners have a range of good plans in place to deliver shared priorities. For example, the Council has integrated youth support with the Youth Offending Team and is looking to extend integration with PCT services. Similarly, the Adult Commissioning Strategy 2007-2010 includes clear objectives to reduce health inequalities. These arrangements provide a clear framework for progressing the Council's aims.
- 44 The Council has a good understanding of the needs of all sections of its community. For example, it takes into account the needs of its BME communities; it has clear priorities for equalities and diversity and has developed programmes to address these needs. It has developed best practice in the use of Braille materials, developing the Safe@Home integrated service on domestic abuse and Community Springboard programmes for women's development. The Council has a good approach to community cohesion and has recently restructured the Community Cohesion Group to ensure all service areas are represented.
- 45 In developing and reviewing its priorities the Council engages effectively with its partners and the community. For example, the Council is working effectively with three private sector partners to regenerate Wakefield city centre (the developers for Westgate, Trinity Walk and the Waterfront) which is intended to significantly improve the attractiveness of the city centre. These developments are promoting the key priorities of social and economic regeneration. There are also some examples of shared resources. For example, the PCT funds the delivery of some council services. However, the overall utilisation of shared resource and budget planning is still at an early stage of development. Overall, most shared priorities are successfully delivered through joint working.
- 46 The Council has a strong approach to communicating with its citizens and involving them in shaping council and service priorities. A notable example is the Council Web page Youth Voice that has been used effectively by 300 young people to influence the planning of service priorities. Recent consultation topics include redeveloping the Watermill, encouraging the use of Libraries and making the Tourist Office more useful. The Council provided feedback about what has happened as result of this consultation and has taken action - such as increasing library stock for young people and consulting them about book choices.

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

- 47 Whilst the Council's financial climate is challenging, it has a robust Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), which is clearly based on the Council's strategic priorities. Sound financial planning has ensured that the Council is clearly focusing its resources on the priorities. The Council is effective at moving resources from areas that are no longer priority areas. For example in the 2005/06 budget, additional resource was provided to improve levels of student achievement and to develop Social Care services and in the 2007/08 budget over £2 million was moved from Regeneration Services (mainly from Strategic Transport and Highways) to fund improvements in waste management. This demonstrates that the Council uses its resources effectively to support its priorities.
- 48 The Council has shown it can take difficult decisions. An example of this is the modernisation programme of day centres for people with learning disabilities. This involved the closure of large day centres and a move to smaller community based accommodation to promote greater inclusion. The Council also closed a number of residential homes for older people in order to provide extra care facilities in the district. Both service improvements were introduced despite strong local opposition and are now highly valued by users.
- 49 The Council works well with BME and multi-faith organisations to remain fully informed of issues around cohesion and diversity. It worked with the Wakefield District BME Forum to build links with 32 BME organisations, share common experiences and develop solutions that meet the needs of residents from those communities. The Council supports RASA, a local support agency, as a means of engaging with refugees and asylum seekers in the district. It provides interpreting and advocacy services and, with the Council, has developed a Migrant Workers Information Pack and Myth Busting leaflet to promote greater awareness. These arrangements keep people from minority communities well informed about what the Council is doing for them.
- 50 A wide range of engagement channels and activities are used effectively to improve understanding and strengthen cohesion. VOX, the Community Empowerment Network for Wakefield District, collaborates with the Council and other statutory organisations on engagement and empowerment issues. This includes public events, such as Wakefield Speaks, Student Speaks, and the Citizens Panel. The Council has achieved Beacon Status for Positive Youth Engagement. The neighbourhood management pilots and communities of interest provide regular opportunities to hear from residents and identify priorities.

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

Capacity

- 51 The Council is performing well in this area. Leadership is strong and inclusive. There are good calibre councillors and staff and effective processes and systems. Morale is high and partners are used effectively to increase the capacity of the Council. The Council's workforce is not representative of local communities. There are financial constraints on both the revenue budget and the capital programme. The Council has an effective MTFP to address these issues and is adopting a comprehensive approach to commissioning to help address its financial position. This is a step change for the Council and will stretch its capacity.
- 52 Strong and visible leadership is provided by the Leader and the Chief Executive. The relationship between the Leader and new Chief Executive (in post July 2008) is constructive and is setting a culture of open, honest and inclusive relations within the Council. The calibre of senior councillors and managers is good. Senior councillors and managers are aware of each others role and work together to deliver local priorities. This strong partnership is providing stability after a period of uncertainty and will assist the Council to achieve its ambitions and priorities.
- 53 The Council has a good approach to the development of councillors. For example, it achieved the Yorkshire and Humberside Elected Member Development Charter in December 2006. A Member Development Working Group has been established to lead this Improvement Programme. The Development Group has taken the lead in developing and delivering this Strategy and will be responsible for reviewing the implementation of the Training and Development Plan and determining training priorities for future years. However, there has been variable engagement of councillors. This means that the full benefits of the programme are not being achieved. A clear ethical framework is in place within the Council.
- 54 Overview and Scrutiny arrangements are effective. These include a focus on performance management, risk, relations with Cabinet and priorities such as waste management and climate change. External consultation and advice has been sought on scrutiny issues such as BBC Met Office and Bradford University on Climate Change policy. Scrutiny has been able to influence policy on key issues such as waste management, bullying, domestic violence and climate change.

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

- 55 Internal communication within the Council is good. It understands that effective internal communications improves reputation internally and externally. It has clear corporate strategies and standards for internal communications and employee engagement supported by toolkits. A range of methods are used to communicate to staff, such as 'Insight', a monthly staff newsletter that promotes and provides updates on key council priorities such as Worksmart, team briefings, the intranet and managers' conferences. These methods keep staff well informed and more likely to support the Council's priorities. They also contribute to the high morale of staff.
- 56 The Council has a robust budget strategy to manage the 2008/09 revenue budget and capital programme. The budget strategy for 2008/09 is fundamentally focused on the need to plan and manage resources effectively. It takes account of the projected shortfall in capital resources as a result of the recent reduction in property values. It seeks to ensure that the Council can maximise investment in priorities and maintain structured progress towards its strategic objectives. At the same time it addresses specific pressures within budget plans and the key challenges facing the Council and its partners.
- 57 The Medium Term Financial Plan clearly sets out the Council's strong commitment to achieving VFM. The July 2008 update identified the forecast shortfalls in the next three years and the importance of efficiencies and VFM initiatives in meeting these shortfalls. These include the £10 million a year savings that are anticipated from the commissioning approach that is being adopted by the Council. Further work is in progress to identify more opportunities for alternative forms of service delivery. This shows that the Council is continuously looking at ways and methods of improving service delivery.
- 58 The Council's Worksmart programme is delivering significant efficiencies. Hot desking and better IT has allowed 180 people to work from the Municipal Building in Pontefract, in space previously occupied by 56 and has saved 22,000 commuter miles and 60 tons of carbon. The office space requirement has been reduced by 40 per cent in less than a year and paper usage has reduced by 77 per cent over six months. This shows the Council's commitment to change and improvement and what is possible through the Worksmart programme.
- 59 The Council is using ICT effectively to support its strategic priorities and build capacity. The five-year e-Services strategy is supporting the Council's modernisation priorities and partnership working. For example, through the agreement with its software provider, the Council forecasts cashable benefits of £7.4 million, 210 per cent return on investment, and a payback period of less than one year. New IT arrangements are also improving service delivery. For example, the number of benefit assessments undertaken within 24 hours has increased by 337 per cent over the last year. Working with its software provider, the Council is delivering increased staff effectiveness through the Worksmart programme. As a result ICT is improving efficiency and outcomes for citizens and communities.

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

- 60 The Council has an effective strategic approach to partnering. It uses partners to enhance its capacity in key areas. For example, a joint venture ensures that it provides a good quality design and construction procurement service. The Council has also received £626,000 from a volume discount agreement. It also ensures that the appropriate skills and experience are available to manage large scale projects in the area.
- 61 Strategic commissioning across the Council and with partners is effective, with work in progress to expand the overall approach to commissioning. For example, it is identifying the areas that could benefit from alternative types of service delivery, which will test the existing capacity of the organisation to drive and co-ordinate this expansion, particularly at senior management level. The Council has established a commissioning framework with the voluntary sector, which reflects the constructive working relationships with the voluntary and community sector. However, the Council has yet to maximise the potential of the sector, particularly the smaller local groups.
- 62 The Council's approach to procurement is strong and well established. The Council has achieved Beacon Status for its procurement function and secured external funding (£104,000) through the Beacon Peer Support Fund to take forward sustainable procurement. Ninety eight per cent of all routine supplies and services are covered by contracts. Local procurement spend through collaborative arrangements has increased from 40 per cent to 56 per cent, which represents a £126 million input to the regional economy. The sourcing and ordering process has been streamlined through e-procurement. These initiatives have enhanced the Council's capacity to deliver more cost effective services.
- 63 Asset management arrangements are effective. The Asset Management Strategy and Plan 2006-2009 sets out a clear approach for dealing with its asset base and is integrated into service planning through the Service AMPs. It is also linked to the Corporate Plan, but not to the Community Strategy - though the previous Plan was. Asset management is used to ensure that VFM is achieved in the property portfolio.
- 64 The Council's workforce planning processes are good. They are integrated into the service planning processes. The Corporate Workforce plan is comprehensive, fit for purpose and has recently been updated and integrated with the Human Resource Strategy. It has a clear line of sight from the Council's strategic priorities and clear links with the 2007 national pay and workforce strategy and government legislation and initiatives. The high level summary action plan is cross-referenced to the CIPs. The strategy reports a track record of success and the impact of achievement, for example reducing turnover.
- 65 The Council has made relatively slow but effective progress in concluding its equal pay issues. It is on target to implement a new pay and grading framework. In addition, the Council has taken the opportunity to review its terms and conditions and has set an ambitious and optimistic target of April 2009 to conclude all this work.

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

- 66 The Council is taking effective steps to reduce sickness absence. Average levels decreased from almost 11 days in 2006/07 to 10.1 days in 2007/08, and the Council is on track to achieve its target for 2008/09 of 9.7 days. The Council has recognised that uncertainty as a result of organisational change has impacted negatively on absence levels and has recently instituted a holistic Well-being programme to promote attendance, which is already showing a positive impact.
- 67 Joint workforce planning is underdeveloped. The Council is involved in some joint workforce planning exercises with partners, including the development of an Integrated Children's Workforce strategy, which is due for publication in December 2008. However not all relevant partners are engaged in such exercises and the Council and partners may not be exploiting effectively the opportunities to address skill shortages and retain and develop staff.
- 68 The Council has an effective approach to diversity. It is currently self-assessed at level 3 on the Local Government Equality Standard. Equality and Human Rights considerations are embedded across the Council. Internal support staff networks have tackled service based issues representing community of interest groups. These include health, regeneration and domestic abuse. The Council's workforce is not representative of local communities, in particular BME and disabled communities. Although targets are in place to improve this and are being monitored through performance clinics, it is not clear what actions are in place to improve performance. It has not been effective in dealing with this issue. However, overall, councillors and staff demonstrate a commitment to promoting equality.

Performance management

- 69 The Council is performing well in this area. It has a robust and effective framework for managing its performance. There is a strong culture of improvement at all levels within the Council. The objectives in its strategic plans are visibly reflected throughout the organisation in service business plans, team plans and individual employees' targets. However, more than a fifth of employees did not receive an annual appraisal last year. Links between performance, financial and risk management are not robust enough. Performance management is effective at Board level in Wakefield Together. Systems used by the thematic partnerships have not helped them to challenge each other rigorously on cross-cutting issues, but arrangements are now being strengthened. Overall, the Council has secured improvement in more than two thirds of indicators measured by the Audit Commission over the last year.
- 70 Within the Council, there is a strong culture of improvement which extends well beyond the senior management team. This is now embedded and sustainable. Middle managers and front line staff are enthusiastic about their targets and passionate about delivering better services. As a result of their initiatives, the Council gained Chartermarks, for example for the Registration Service, as well as awards, such as in two categories of Yorkshire in Bloom. These reflect the commitment of staff to improving services.

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

- 71** Performance reports are clear and accessible for councillors, senior managers and directorates. The reports highlight areas of underperformance and clarify where action is needed. However, although councillors and managers also receive regular reports on the budget, performance and financial reporting is not well aligned. The timetables for reporting the two strands do not match well. Neither is there a clear link with risk management at corporate level. This makes it difficult for decision makers to take full account of risks and financial implications when they consider service performance.
- 72** Councillors make an effective contribution to performance management and this leads to service improvement. The Leader's Strategy Group holds a quarterly clinic to review the Council's performance. For example, their focus on planning appeals led to better systems and reduced numbers of appeals. Lead councillors meet service directors individually and challenge performance. Overview and Scrutiny work also drives improvement. For example, a recent project on markets led to better working relationships with traders and useful suggestions for environmental improvements at market sites. Similarly, scrutiny of changes to recycling collections looked at reasons for customer dissatisfaction and promoted practical solutions. There are now fewer complaints.
- 73** Performance clinics attended by the Chief Executive and CMT members, are also effective in promoting improvement in underperforming services. These focus on how well the Council is performing against its own targets. For example, recent work on case reviews for looked after children improved coverage from 65 per cent to 87 per cent in less than two years. Overall, more than two thirds (68 per cent) of those performance indicators monitored by the Audit Commission improved last year.
- 74** Councillors and officers use comparisons with other authorities effectively to identify underperformance and take remedial action. Many front line staff also have good knowledge of how their service performs compared with that of other authorities. Benchmarking leads to action. For example, the Council has successfully reduced the error rate in benefits overpayments from 37 per cent to 6 per cent over two years through comparing itself with high performers.
- 75** Within Wakefield Together, performance management is well established at Board level. The partners share data and work collaboratively. However, joint performance management is better embedded in some thematic partnerships than others and, until recently, their reporting systems were inconsistent. Consequently, the partnerships have struggled to take a cross-cutting approach. For example, systems did not facilitate links between performance on worklessness and health. Work is now underway to strengthen these links. Overall, joint working has led to some good outcomes. For example, in 2007/08, 70 per cent of the LAA targets were met and of the 22 stretch targets, only four were significantly below target.

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

- 76 The Council uses questionnaires and surveys to involve service users effectively in performance management. For example, staff telephoned a 10 per cent sample of users of the new contact centre to collect feedback on how well their call had been handled. The Citizens' Panel and Wakefield Speaks events also contribute. However, direct user involvement in managing performance is limited to a relatively small number of services, notably children and young people. There are plans to extend this approach to older people and people with learning disabilities, but arrangements are not yet in place. The Council effectively informs residents effectively about its performance through regular reports in *The Citizen* and by annual summary reports, circulated to all households. Overall, citizens know how the Council is performing and have opportunities to feed in their views.
- 77 The Council is willing to learn from external sources. It has recently reviewed its complaints procedure in response to resident feedback that it was too slow. The Council listens to feedback from residents and service managers take complaints seriously. For example, the Council recently added covers to recycling boxes after numerous complaints from citizens about wind-blown litter. However, councillors and senior managers do not receive regular reports about changing patterns of complaints across the whole Council. Without this, it is hard for them to understand which issues have been successfully resolved and which still require action.
- 78 Learning from other organisations is also part of the Council's culture. External reviews of Worksmart, internal communication and human resources all led to action. The Council refined its methodology for reviewing value for money after a visit to an authority where the system was already in use. Visits to high performing authorities helped the Council develop successful plans to remove Planning Standards Authority status.

What has been achieved?

- 79** The Council is performing well in this area. It has made good progress in delivering many of its priorities. The main achievements include reductions in crime, improved levels of cleanliness, high levels of inward investment, increased employment, improved educational attainment, implementing the Wakefield Standard for social housing, reducing homelessness and people in temporary accommodation, achieving a shift away from car usage in Wakefield city centre and improving services for vulnerable older people. These are all priorities for the local community. The priority areas that it is still seeking to improve are reducing the fear of crime and reducing health inequalities.
- 80** Links between local and national and shared priorities are effective. The priorities in the Corporate Plan translate well into the shared priorities. For example, the Skills, enterprise and work priority fits well into the Sustainable communities and transport shared priority. The Skills part also fits with the Children and young people shared priority. The Safer and stronger communities priority fits well the Safer and stronger shared priority. The Healthier communities priority fits with the Healthier communities, Older people and children and young people shared priorities.
- 81** The priorities are the product of extensive consultation with local communities. The medium term financial planning process focuses on the delivery of these priorities. The performance management frameworks at partnership, council and service levels also focus on the delivery of these priorities. This explains the good level of achievement set out in this section along with the continuous level of improvement over the last three years. During this period, 68 per cent of the Council's performance indicators improved, compared with a national average of 66 per cent.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 82** The Council is working well with partners to regenerate the area, improve the local economy, develop sustainable transport and the local housing market - in particular the quality of the social housing.
- 83** The Council is a highly effective strategic partner in the regeneration of the area. At regional level, the Council is seen as a strong partner, delivering what it says it will deliver. As a result of this positive image it has been able to attract additional funding for regeneration projects. For example, Yorkshire Forward made £4.4 million available from under spend in 2006/07 to help with a key acquisition for the Waterfront development. This allowed the development to proceed.

What has been achieved?

- 84** The Council has set challenging targets in the MAA to raise skills levels in the district and improve public transport. Attracting higher quality jobs to the district is one of the Council's priorities, clearly set out in the Economic Regeneration Strategy and LAA. One of the ways of doing this is increasing the number of higher level qualifications across the district. The target for the proportion of working age population with NVQ 4+ is an increase from 19.8 per cent to 25 per cent by 2015. Within the Leeds City Region, the Council is actively promoting improved public transport such as the Leeds/York rail link. The MAA supports Council efforts to achieve these priorities.
- 85** The approach to developing sustainable communities has been clear and effective. For example, targeted initiatives have helped to create 5,000 jobs at the Glasshoughton site and a further 3,700 are being created through the regeneration of Wakefield city centre. Unemployment has reduced by 2.7 per cent over the past 12 months. There has also been an increase in employment rates amongst disadvantaged groups in some of the most deprived areas. This success is having a direct impact on the strength of the local economy.
- 86** The Council is making good use of its purchasing power to make the local economy stronger and more sustainable. For example, the Council has begun to purchase more services from voluntary and community organisations and has raised supplier awareness and understanding. The Council's supplier base comprises 90 per cent small and medium sized enterprises, which account for 60 per cent of the Council's annual purchases. As a result the Council is able to support small business growth by raising local supplier knowledge and promoting competition through its own procurement procedures.
- 87** The Council makes effective use of its procurement activity to improve sustainability, such as during the purchase new ICT. Invitations to tender routinely require low energy consumption on energy management facilities, cost of ownership considerations include energy and disposal costs over the life cycle, and opportunities for eliminating unnecessary wastage including energy, paper, consumables, and travel costs. The Council has an effective carbon management plan which informs its procurement activity and promotes sustainability. As a result, procurement considerations help to realise environmental benefits, including a reduction in CO2 emissions.
- 88** Social aspects of sustainable development and sustainable communities are well understood and promoted strongly. The Sustainable Community Strategy has a strong focus on individuals and communities being more self-reliant and taking responsibility for themselves, each other and their neighbourhoods. The Strategy does not take the same level of account of environmental resources and limits. This reflects the emphasis on people and communities in partners' priorities.

- 89 The plans to regenerate Wakefield city centre through the Renaissance Programme are ambitious and well progressed. One aim of the Programme is to develop a high quality urban environment for people, by redirecting traffic around the city centre rather than through it via a scheme called the Emerald Ring. The environment will be enhanced by using good quality materials for the street scene and roads and making the area as car-free as possible. To achieve this, the Council is seeking to encourage 20 per cent of car-users to use other forms of transport. The Free City Bus has already achieved a 3 per cent shift and the Council expects a combination of park and ride schemes and multi story car parks to achieve the rest. This would have a significant impact on the quality of life for the people who live, work and visit the city centre.
- 90 The scale of the Renaissance Programme is impressive. Three developments are underway in the city centre (Trinity Walk, Waterfront and Westgate). Over £225 million of private sector and £56 million of public sector investment has been attracted to the city centre. This will generate the relocation of the Westgate station, 500,000 square feet of retail floor space, over 600,000 square feet of office accommodation, a range of private and social housing and a new art gallery. When complete, these developments will transform the quality of the environment and stimulate the local economy.
- 91 Sustainable development issues are addressed well in the Council's waste PFI contract. The Council's approach to the development of the waste PFI has sought to make the contract more sustainable in terms of how waste is treated and transport impacts - although waste reduction is not promoted strongly. The development is the first of its kind in Europe and is based on an innovative approach to waste disposal. The target is to increase the level of recycling to 55 per cent by 2015. The PFI contract represents a significant contribution to the sustainable development of the district.
- 92 There has been a marked improvement in the cleanliness of the district. For example, during the last year, the Council has introduced new and effective kerbside recycling collections across the district. In the areas where the collections were piloted, recycling rates have increased from 23 per cent to nearly 40 per cent. Between 2004/05 and 2007/08 there has been a significant improvement in the cleanliness of land and highways - from 29 per cent to 11 per cent of land littered. These improvements both have a significant impact on the quality of the environment.
- 93 Social housing is being used very effectively to improve the quality of life for residents. The Wakefield Standard is a higher specification than the Decent Homes Standard. It includes enhanced work both inside dwellings and in the local environment. As a result the government has agreed a two-year extension to the implementation of the Standard, from 2010 to 2012. The implementation of the Standard is being used to support other corporate priorities, such as safer and stronger and healthier. It also is being used to support skills, enterprise and work through employment initiatives. As a result the skills and work experience of local people have been increased.

What has been achieved?

- 94 The Council is performing well in the achievement of its affordable housing programme. In the 2006/08 National Affordable Housing Programme for Wakefield, £32.5 million of investment was achieved in the district to develop 317 affordable homes. Three hundred of these homes are either completed or near completion. In addition, 24 family homes are being constructed to the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 - the highest eco-specification in the sub-region. A track record of effective delivery has helped to increase investment in the 2008/11 programme to £58.4 million, which will support the construction of a further 480 new affordable homes. These homes are improving the quality of life for the residents who might otherwise have remained on the waiting list.
- 95 The Council and its partners have tackled homelessness effectively. Between 2004/05 and 2007/08 the numbers of people in temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast have reduced from 266/134 to 90/4 respectively. However, the Council anticipates a reversal of this downward trend during 2008/09, and is forecasting an increase of up to 28 per cent. The Council and partners are using a number of initiatives to limit the impact of this anticipated increase.

Safer and stronger communities

- 96 The Council is working effectively through a range of partnerships to deliver its priorities for safer and stronger communities. The partners are meeting most targets for crime reduction and crimes solved and cohesion in the district is good.
- 97 The level of crime reduction in Wakefield is good. The reduction is one of the largest in West Yorkshire. Crime reduction is one of the key concerns for residents. Overall crimes (BSC Comparator Crime) have fallen by 35 per cent based on the 2003/04 baseline. Performance in reducing fear of crime is not as good and remains a priority for the Council and partners. Public perception of anti-social behaviour as a problem has increased (41 per cent in 2003 to 43 per cent in 2006), and is higher than average for the sub-region. Targeting violent crime, acquisitive crime, anti-social behaviour, and domestic abuse has seen positive outcomes. However, targets for reducing burglaries and violence against the person have not been met.
- 98 The executive level structures for delivering the Safer & Stronger Partnership are too broad and not well integrated. This means that joint enforcement tasking and operational links into neighbourhood management activities are not fully effective. Local delivery mechanisms and joint working frameworks are not sufficiently co-ordinated. However, the Council, the PCT, the Police and other CDRP partners work well together This promotes a strong shared commitment among the partners to tackling crime.
- 99 Community safety issues are effectively integrated into all key council services. Staff are able to identify how crime and disorder impacts on their areas of responsibility. Business planning processes require services to assess the impact of community safety on their service. As a result there is strong understanding and commitment to promoting the Council's priorities for safer and stronger communities.

- 100** There is a good understanding of the key issues facing the district. For example, hate-crime incidents reported to the Police (626 between April 2007 and August 2008) remain comparatively low for the region, while reported homophobic incidents, as part of the overall hate-crime figures have declined. Four per cent of violent crime in the six months to December 2007 had a racial element, and the level of reported domestic abuse incidents in the district is relatively high compared to similar areas.
- 101** The Council, with its partners, is effective at taking action to improve performance. Examples include providing joined up support for individuals and families through services such as the Safe@Home, Open Door and Families First services, alongside the Supporting People Programme. In addition, community safety issues in relation to community groups made vulnerable by their circumstances are being monitored and dealt with through a multi agency hate incidents group. This includes provision of a telephone helpline to support victims of hate crime. As a result, the level of repeat incidents of reported domestic abuse has declined from 48 per cent in 2004/05 to 38 per cent (June 08); and the number of crimes solved increased from 43 per cent to 49 per cent over the same period.
- 102** The combined work of the Youth Offending Team and partners has been effective in reducing re-offending by young people. The Council and partners have introduced a range of actions to target prolific and priority offenders (PPOs), which have supported a 54 per cent reduction in the re-conviction rate. The Targeted Youth Support Partnership oversees a range of intervention, reparation and diversionary activities aimed at preventing and diverting young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. The number of first time entrants to the youth justice achieving measurable improvements system has reduced; and arrests fell from 875 in 2005/06 to 717 in 2006/07.
- 103** The Council and its partners make effective use of enforcement measures. Wakefield is a Respect area - part of a Government plan for tackling anti-social behaviour and creating a culture of respect. The Council has adopted a neighbourhood-based approach to tackling environmental crime and anti-social behaviour. It has served 343 ASBOs; 144 of these are still active and being monitored. Appropriate enforcement measures include the use of dispersal zones, controlled drinking areas, and removal of drug-related litter within 24 hours of reporting in Westgate and other town centres most affected. Between 2003/04 and 2007/08 criminal damage declined by over a quarter, from 10,055 to 7,203 crimes. There was also a 60 per cent reduction in the number of abandoned vehicles, a 26 per cent reduction in complaints of gangs and rowdy behaviour; and the number of deliberate fires fell by 47 per cent. This demonstrates that the Council's remedial action is well focused on tackling anti-social behaviour, and is delivering successful outcomes.
- 104** There is a robust approach to reducing the harm caused by drug and alcohol misuse. Effective and targeted work between the Drug and Alcohol Team (DAT) and the Drugs Intervention Programme has helped partners to meet drug treatment targets. The percentage of drug misusers remaining in treatment for 12 weeks increased from 77 per cent in 2006/07 to 82 per cent in 2007/08 and repeat offending is reducing. The integrated approach to alcohol control and the night time economy is also effective.

What has been achieved?

- 105** Wakefield First is effective at tackling business crime. The Council leads on the coordination of the Disorder and Licensing Operational Group (DIALOG) in conjunction with the Police, Fire Service and PCT to support victims of crime and disorder within their licensed premises. The appointment of a dedicated business crime team and launch of the Crimeseen website has helped partners to exceed business crime reduction targets and local businesses working together better.
- 106** The Council and its partners' approach to improving road safety is adequate. Although safety is improving, more people are killed or injured compared to similar areas elsewhere in the country. The high level of accidents is in part reflective of the M62 which runs through the district. To tackle this, the Council has introduced initiatives such as a travel awareness programme; road safety education and training in schools; speed control; and traffic light safety cameras in targeted hotspots. As a result, the number of people killed or seriously injured improved from 188 in 2005/06 to 164 in 2006/07.
- 107** The Council has clear and comprehensive incident management procedures for dealing with emergency situations. Detailed information on business continuity is widely available to the community through the Council's website. Service business continuity and disaster recovery plans are monitored through local risk management processes and ensure that critical services can be delivered effectively in emergencies. Plans include mutual aid arrangements to identify and support vulnerable people. Work with emergency service providers is well developed and, following local flooding incidents in 2007, have been updated to record the lessons learned and comply with civil contingencies legislation requirements. The Council is well prepared for emergencies.
- 108** Overall, cohesion is good in the district. A range of community-led initiatives is building community cohesion and delivering outcomes. The Council is working with a variety of partners, including the Association of West Yorkshire Authorities, VAWD, Wakefield's Youth Parliament and 'Pride not Prejudice', to raise awareness and promote respect between faiths and groups. The Council's racial incident monitoring scheme enables it to monitor racial incidents and harassment, and has taken action on 100 per cent of racial incidents reported to the Council since 2004. Ninety per cent of citizens feel they belong to their area, and 68 per cent believe citizens from different backgrounds get on well together.

Healthier communities

- 109** Wakefield has a legacy of poor health. The Council has an excellent understanding of local health needs and has made improving health a priority since 2004. There are strong partnership arrangements. For example, the 2008-2011 LAA includes clear health priorities. The Council has made significant investment in this area. However, key health targets have not been achieved.

- 110** The Council and health partners have access to robust health data and analysis and have produced a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for the district. There was extensive engagement and consultation on the content of the JSNA, which included the local public health conference and 732 people who responded to the Healthier Communities Survey. The findings from this engagement informed the analysis and design of the JSNA.
- 111** The robust JSNA takes account of a range of health, social, education, economic factors at a ward level to provide the Council and partners with a strong strategic understanding of the local population. This is used to determine policy to tackle determinants of poor health and health inequalities. In addition the Council has commissioned a detailed report on the health needs of ethnic minorities. This found that migrant workers needed more information about health matters including dentistry and availability of Polish food. People of Pakistani origin had the most health concerns. Women in particular needed opportunities for more physical activity. Through the Partnership Information and Intelligence Group good intelligence sharing has informed partnership priorities and action plans to reduce health inequalities and improve outcomes across the district.
- 112** The Council and its partners have a clear, shared approach to tackling health inequalities. Health has been a stated Council ambition since 2004. The Healthier Communities Partnership Board aims are to improve overall health in the district and to reduce health inequalities. The Board has overall responsibility for driving forward the challenges within the Developing Knowledge Communities Community Strategy through an annual Healthier Communities Action Plan. The Council and NHS Wakefield have made a joint appointment of the Director of Public Health and established a Joint Health Unit. Well established arrangements help to focus the partnership on improving health outcomes.
- 113** Joint health strategies are not consistently SMART and do not contain interim targets. The Health Inequalities Strategy is yet to be completed. There are some health inequalities, joint actions and targets that are included in the LAA delivery plans which are accountable through the Healthier Communities Partnership. However, there is no systematic evaluation of the impact of health projects and no clear corporate co-ordination within the Council of health related strategies, action plans and delivery initiatives. Consequently there is a mixed picture of improvement on health.
- 114** Overview & Scrutiny provides robust challenge of NHS Wakefield and Council strategies, but does not explicitly focus on health inequalities. The Social Care and Health OSC effectively challenges and probes health activities and has a positive impact on service configuration. For example, rigorous scrutiny of intermediate care arrangements prompted partners to tackle the inequity of provision. The PCT also responded to scrutiny's concerns about the reduction of primary care services in Agbrigg and responded by introducing an extended-GP locally-enhanced service in the area. Overall, scrutiny is improving health services, but has a limited impact on inequalities.

What has been achieved?

- 115** There is a mixed picture of improvement on improving health and reducing health inequalities in the district. The Council is part of the national Spearhead group of local authorities that are in the bottom fifth for health and deprivation. It has a target to reduce the gap as measured by infant mortality and life expectancy, by 10 per cent by 2010. This target is a nationally recognised measure of progress on reducing health inequalities for the most deprived communities in a primary care trust and local authority area. Current performance in Wakefield will not meet the national target for 2010 and the life expectancy gap has slightly increased in comparison with 1995-1997 and 2004-2006.
- 116** There have been some notable improvements in performance. For example, mortality rates for cancers have fallen by 14.5 per cent between 1999/01 and 2004/06 - better than the national rate of improvement. The incidence of circulatory diseases has reduced by 26.3 per cent compared with 24 per cent nationally. The 2007 Indices of Deprivation indicate that conditions on health and disability have improved in many deprived areas and an increasing number of people known to mental health and learning disability services have moved into paid work or preparation for work. Targets that have been met include smoking prevalence, premature mortality, adults participating in physical activity, numbers in alcohol treatment, people with mental health and learning disabilities in employment.
- 117** This level of improvement is not reflected in the LAA outcomes framework for 2007/08; 11 of the 20 targets that have not been achieved directly relate to improving health outcomes. These include key areas, such as children in reception and year six that are obese, under-18 conception rate, patients with BMI recorded, and GP practices participating in obesity training. The overall health of adults is improving but the Council is not meeting some national priorities such as reducing teenage pregnancy. Lack of progress on key health outcomes means the Council will not reduce health inequalities in line with national and local targets by 2010.
- 118** The Council is making effective progress on improving determinants of poor health. It achieved LAA targets on some determinants of poor health such as school travel plans, offenders in drug treatment, reducing homelessness, decent homes, reducing fuel poverty in private sector and increasing average SAP rating of public sector housing. Through Sure Start Children's Centres, the Council is delivering a range of high quality preventative and support services for children and parents in the most disadvantaged areas. The three pilots on neighbourhood management are seeking to address the determinants of poor health, such as lack of exercise and reducing smoking. Regeneration initiatives will also impact on health by tackling worklessness and through co-location of health services.

119 The Council and its partners are aware of the need to focus more on improving the health of the population and reducing health inequalities. The Council has been consulted on the Choosing Health Outcome indicators in the PCTs World Class Commissioning strategy. The indicators chosen by NHS Wakefield link strongly to the new LAA framework and include reducing health inequalities, such as life expectancy at time of birth, smoking during pregnancy, childhood obesity, incidences of cancers and long term conditions. The intention is to provide a strong focus on key health priorities, ensure robust performance management and together with robust evaluation of initiatives lead to an improvement in the overall health of the population and reduce health inequalities. It is too early to measure the progress of these activities.

Older people

120 The partners' strategy for older people, Positively Ageing, takes good account of their needs beyond just health and social care. It covers housing for active as well as vulnerable people; lifelong learning; skills for employment; sport and leisure; and transport. For example, actions planned include swimming and fitness programmes; anti-poverty strategies for those on the lowest incomes; and promoting expert patient programmes for people with specialist health needs. The strategy is explicitly linked to LAA targets covering older people, employment, health and leisure. Although it is still in draft, the strategy builds on existing provision and offers an imaginative but realistic framework for developing services further.

121 A councillor designated as older people's champion has successfully raised the profile of older people across the district, particularly through his active role in consultation. Other leading councillors are committed to improving the lives of older people and act as strong advocates for this group. For example, this focus resulted in a review of support for older carers following the death or hospital admission of the person they cared for.

122 Consultation with older people and their carers takes place frequently and leads to action. There are six locality-based forums in the district and an Age Concern Forum with 230 members. Examples of outcomes from consultation include more respite for carers, more specialist provision for BME communities including exercise classes for men, and some small-scale, but well valued local transport schemes such as the Wakey Bus.

123 Strategies to support older people take good account of the needs of their carers. For example, Forget me not cafes, in partnership with the Alheimers Society, provide an opportunity for social contact and informal support. Carers took up 1,149 respite care breaks in 2007/08; an increase of 65 per cent over the previous year.

124 The Council has responded effectively to older people's expressed concern about young people's behaviour by providing good opportunities for the generations to meet and share experiences. Thirteen lunch clubs opened in July 2008 in primary schools and more are planned. It is too soon to demonstrate the impact on intergenerational relationships.

What has been achieved?

- 125** There is an effective focus on promoting independence. For example, in 2007 the Council closed four traditional residential homes and replaced these with 90 extra-care apartments, which provide residents with their own homes, supported by domiciliary care. This approach is particularly valued because it allows couples to remain together. The Telecare assisted technology scheme has allowed 1,001 people to remain safely at home since 2006. A recently extended handyman scheme carried out 69 jobs to allow prompt hospital discharge and 737 tasks to reduce the risk of falls. The result of these initiatives is that fewer people are being admitted to permanent residential care. Sixty four fewer placements were made in 2007/08 than in 2005/06 - a reduction of almost 15 per cent.
- 126** Overall, the Council is effective at improving outcomes for older people. For example, take up of Direct Payments increased by a quarter between 2005/06 and 2006/07. Similarly, following Council action to create a seamless benefits service, take up of benefits by 50 to 60 year olds more than quadrupled over two years to £573,730. These are outcomes that directly benefit older people and support their independence.

Children and young people

- 127** Outcomes for children and young people in Wakefield are generally good and improving. Most health outcomes are in line with similar councils and referrals to specialist mental health services are seen promptly and usually exceed timescales achieved nationally. Improvements in the arrangements for safeguarding children and young people ensure a high proportion of initial assessments are undertaken on time and the rate of re-referrals is lower than found in similar areas. Educational achievements are above national averages at GCSE and the rate of improvement in secondary schools is good. A high proportion of young people aged 19 achieve level 3 and the proportion not in education, employment and training is close to similar council areas.
- 128** Service management in Wakefield is good. The ambition for children and young people is realistic and shared by all key partners. The priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan link well with other strategic plans and resources are well directed to these priorities. Recent improvements have been supported by more robust performance management arrangements together with clearer strategic planning linked to targets and outcomes. The performance management framework has allowed progress and improvement to be monitored more closely.
- 129** The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate. Partners and schools work collaboratively to promote healthy lifestyles. Participation in the National Healthy Schools programme is above the average for statistical neighbours and nationally. Significant improvements have been secured in children and adolescent mental health services. However, the rate of teenage conception is now slightly above that found in similar areas and is only reducing slowly. The level of obesity in children and young people is high.

- 130** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people keep safe is good. There has been a significant improvement in a number of key areas during the last year. A high proportion of initial assessments are now being undertaken and completed on time. The rate of re-referrals has fallen markedly and now compares more favourably against similar councils. Most schools are good at ensuring that learners adopt safe practices, and road safety schemes have seen a small reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured on the roads over time. The most recent fostering service inspection judged it to be good and the five children's homes managed directly by the Council are generally good. Most looked-after children live in stable placements with a high proportion benefiting from being fostered by relatives. However, the level of social worker vacancies is high.
- 131** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. Recent educational outcomes indicate that the good rate of improvement has been maintained. In general terms children and young people in Wakefield attend school more regularly, achieve higher standards and make more progress than found in similar areas. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSE A*-C rose in 2007 and now exceeds the performance achieved in similar areas by nearly seven percentage points. The educational attainment of looked after children and young people is similar to the national picture in relation to the proportion achieving at least 1 A*-G GCSE pass. Over time, the number of schools judged by Ofsted to be of concern is low.
- 132** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Participation and consultation with all ages of children and young people are embedded in council activity and there are many examples of innovative work. Wakefield has been awarded Beacon status for youth engagement. There has been an impressive decline in the number of young people entering the justice system. Re-offending rates are similar to statistical neighbours. The percentage of looked-after children participating in their annual reviews is above the national average.
- 133** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. The proportion of young people achieving a level 3 qualification by the age of 19 has consistently been above statistical neighbours for a number of years. The proportion achieving level 2 qualifications has not, however, kept pace with improvements nationally. The above-average proportion of young people gaining qualifications through work-based learning and the high proportion engaged in apprenticeships is a very noteworthy achievement. The proportion of young people not in education, training and employment is very close to statistical neighbours. The proportion of looked-after children in employment, education and training is very good compared to similar areas and the national average.

Appendix 1 – Framework for corporate assessment

- 1 This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2 The Council's self-assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
 - key documentation, including the Council's improvement plan;
 - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
 - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 15 to 26 September 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.

The Audit Commission

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