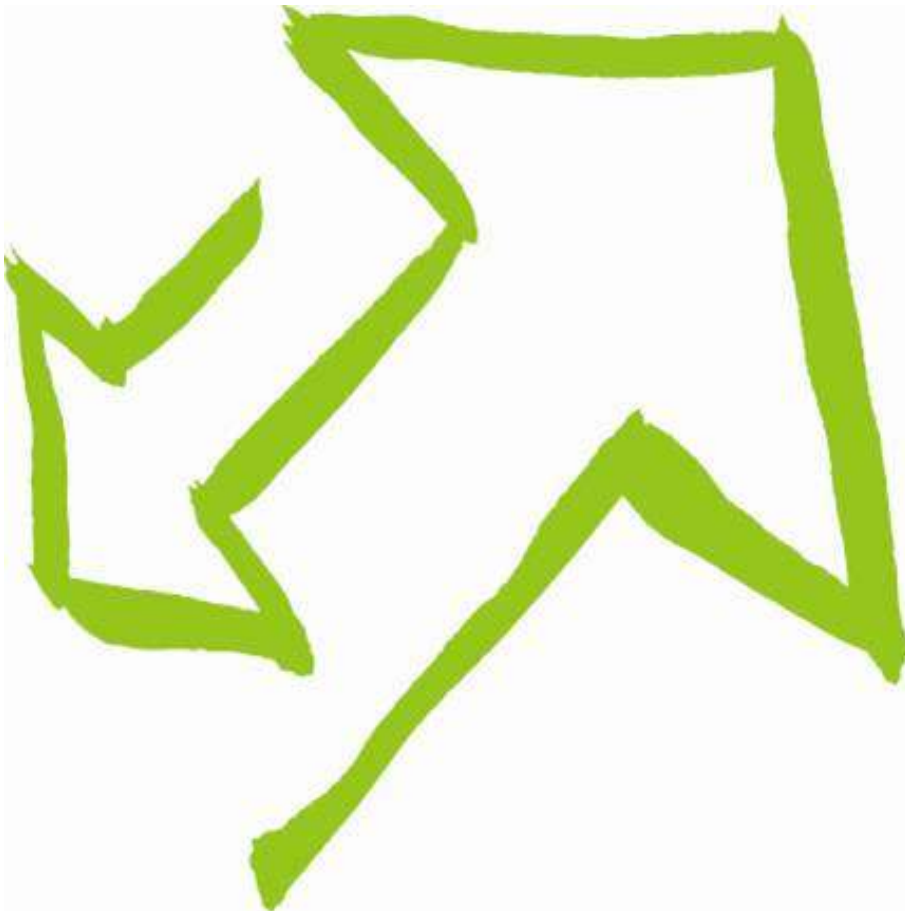


Corporate Assessment

South Tyneside 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). 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 South Tyneside Council is performing strongly overall. Excellent partnership working, supported by challenging ambitions for the area, robust local intelligence, clear priorities and strong performance management are improving outcomes for local people in South Tyneside. The Council continues to maintain its excellent track record of continuous improvement.
- 6 Challenging outcomes for 2020 have been crystallised through the local strategic partnership's sustainable community strategy. Ambitions are grounded in sense of place and seek to address the significant levels of deprivation resulting from the decline of traditional industries in the area. The Council engages well with its communities and communicates decisions clearly. Innovative consultation techniques are deployed such as participatory appraisal in which the Council used local people to engage with their own communities.
- 7 Over time the Council has built up a detailed picture of South Tyneside's neighbourhoods. This intelligence is shared widely and enables partners to work together on the basis of reliable, common intelligence to develop and implement the ambitions and target action. Shared priorities have been agreed and are grounded in a clear understanding of what matters most to local people and why. Innovative solutions have been used to target action through services and at a neighbourhood level, backed up by good and effective systems and processes, although not all supporting plans and targets are yet in place.
- 8 The Council and its partners are passionate and committed as 'one team' to improving the quality of life in South Tyneside. The strength of partnership working is built on a mature and balanced local strategic partnership, in which the private, public and voluntary sectors are equal players. The Chief Executive and Leader of Council are highly regarded and provide strong and effective leadership both to the partnership and the Council. Local people see councillors as providing strong community leadership in their wards and have a high regard for their work in engaging communities. However, the strategic focus of some senior councillors is not so strong, and their use of the scrutiny function is still developing. Therefore it has more to do to improve the capacity of its councillors.
- 9 The Council is extremely adept at maximising its capacity. The Council ensures it makes best use of capacity available to it through partnerships and an open minded and proactive approach to procurement and external funding. The Council manages within a tight financial situation effectively. The Council delivers good value for money (VfM), significantly exceeding its efficiency targets and, most services demonstrate a good focus on VfM.
- 10 The celebration of success, either within the community or its workforce, is second nature to the Council. A focus on equality and diversity ensures that engagement and service delivery take account of the differing needs of its local communities. It responds positively to the diverse needs of the community and its workforce. The Council has a good approach to building in diversity and equality in all its services and activities.

- 11 Based on a clear understanding of what matters and why, the Council and its partners have gone about delivery in a robust way. Outcomes are improving for South Tyneside communities. Employment is increasing with new companies locating in the borough, people are safer and feel safer, and education attainment has improved and closed the gap on the national average. Physical regeneration is evident through new schools, housing and master plans for key sites such as Hebburn Town Centre and the Riverside. Actions, taken by the Council and its partners, to improve the health and well-being of children and young people are outstanding and include achieving a significant reduction in teenage pregnancies. Challenges remaining include achieving the decent homes standard in housing and health inequalities within South Tyneside. Services are provided in a co-ordinated way which has a positive impact on the quality of life of older people.

Areas for improvement

- 12 There are aspects of the corporate planning framework that could be further strengthened. LAA 'must shift' priorities are still being embedded throughout the partnership. Not all supporting plans and targets are in place to underpin the priorities. Personal development plans (PDPs) and regular staff review arrangements need to be more robustly applied at all levels of the organisation. Strengthening the framework will ensure greater clarity around the new priorities.
- 13 The capacity of councillors' should be enhanced. The Council needs to build on the good progress made on programmes of training and development to provide more targeted support. In particular, senior councillors should be supported to ensure they all have a good grasp of strategic, in addition to neighbourhood, issues and also to have greater clarity of their roles and responsibilities. Scrutiny needs to focus more on reviewing and challenging performance and examining executive decisions once they are made. Until this issue is resolved, the Council is not making the most of the capacity of its councillors.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners trying to achieve?	Ambition	4
	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	4
What has been achieved?	Achievement	3
Overall Corporate Assessment Score **		4
* 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		

Summary of assessment scores

** 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

- 14 South Tyneside is situated in North East England and is part of the Tyne and Wear City Region. It is a small borough, covering just 64 square kilometres, and is bordered by the River Tyne to the North and the North Sea to the East. It lies close to the major urban conurbations of Newcastle and Gateshead to the West and Sunderland to the South. The main centres of population are the towns of South Shields, Jarrow and Hebburn along with the villages of Whitburn, Boldon and Cleadon.
- 15 The borough is the 38th most deprived borough nationally, with almost half of the areas within the borough being within the 20 per cent most deprived nationally. The number of households has increased from 65,000 in 1991 to 68,000 today however the population has fallen in recent years to its current level of 151,000. Black or ethnic minority communities comprise 4.4 per cent of the total population. There are well established Yemeni/Arab and Bangladeshi communities. There has been a reduction in the number of children and young people in the borough, with the number of older people increasing.
- 16 The educational attainment of 7, 11 and 14 year olds is improving and the percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs grade A*-C improved in recent years from well below the national average to slightly above. The proportion of the population with qualifications at NVQ level 4 or above stands at 22.8 per cent against the national average of 28.6 per cent.
- 17 Levels of crime are reducing faster than the national average. There was a 15.9 per cent reduction in crime between 2006/07 and 2007/08, the third highest within the basic command unit (BCU) comparator group. South Tyneside has good road, rail and sea transport links. The level of employment stands at 69.6 per cent (compared to 65.6 per cent in December 2006). Unemployment stands at 4.7 per cent compared to the national average of 2.5 per cent. Currently only 40 per cent of the social housing stock meets the decent homes standard. Average house prices are £127,000, compared to an average of £141,000 for Tyne and Wear as a whole.
- 18 The decline of traditional industries such as shipbuilding and coal mining has resulted in significant levels of deprivation. As a result, the area has benefited from significant external funding which the Council and its partners are using to diversify the economy and re-skill local communities as a means of arresting the decline suffered in recent years.
- 19 Deprivation is reflected in the health of local people. Life expectancy averages 75.2 years for men and 80.1 years for women (compared to 77.3 and 81.6 years nationally). Life expectancy varies significantly across the borough; male life expectancy is 81.5 years in Cleadon and East Boldon, but only 72.7 years in Bede. As part of the Government's priority to tackle health inequalities, South Tyneside is designated as a 'Spearhead Authority' area resulting in additional funding being allocated to the Primary Care Trust to address health inequalities.

The Council

- 20 The Council comprises 54 councillors with Labour having an overall majority with 31 members. There are 12 independent councillors, 5 members of the local progressive party, 3 liberal democrats and 3 conservatives.
- 21 The Council's political management arrangements are based on a Leader and Cabinet model. The Cabinet comprises the Leader, Deputy Leader and eight lead members with portfolios which reflect the six community strategy themes in addition to two Council themes of equalities and diversity and, resources. Challenge is provided through an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and three Select Committees. Local communities are engaged through a network of six Community Area Forums, with ward members playing an active role at this local level.
- 22 Managerial leadership is provided by the Chief Executive and the Executive Management Team comprising an Assistant Chief Executive and three Executive Directors responsible for Neighbourhood Services, Children and Young People and Regeneration and Resources. All three executive directors are relatively new and were appointed in 2008. This team is supported by 17 Heads of Services who are responsible for operational service delivery and steer strategy and policy development.
- 23 The Council engages with partners beyond the borough's boundaries by its participation in the Tyne and Wear City Region agenda and has entered into a Multi Area Agreement with neighbouring councils to develop a regional approach to the employment and skills issues they all face.
- 24 Within the borough, the Council works with partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors through its Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), 'Transformation'. Representation includes strong business and voluntary sector involvement; the LSP vice chair is from the business community. The document 'Spirit of South Tyneside' is the partnership's 2008 to 2020 sustainable communities strategy (SCS) and incorporates the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and Regeneration Strategy.
- 25 The Council has transferred the management of its housing stock to South Tyneside Homes, an arms-length management organisation, but remains the largest employer in the borough with 7,150 staff. Its net revenue budget for 2008/09 is £162.4 million (excluding dedicated schools grant of £87.7 million), with a capital programme of £79.6 million. The Band D Council Tax in 2008/09 is £1,371, a 2.95 per cent increase on the previous year.

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

Ambition

- 26 The Council is performing strongly in this area. The Council and its partners are fully focused in their ambitions for South Tyneside. These are grounded in a clear and shared understanding of what matters most to local people and why, based on good engagement and robust intelligence. Challenging outcomes for 2020 have been crystallised through the sustainable community strategy (SCS), the 'Spirit of South Tyneside'. Partners are unanimously positive about the role the Council plays as a community leader and, through a 'one team' culture, all parties are passionate about delivering against the agreed vision and outcomes. Ambitions are underpinned by robust intelligence, a clear focus on neighbourhoods through local councillors who are excellent ambassadors for their areas, and strong partnership working.
- 27 The 2020 vision for the future of South Tyneside is clear, shared and places children and young people at its heart. The SCS, the 'Spirit of South Tyneside', articulates this vision, which focuses on the issues critical to improving long term outcomes.

'Our young people will have new hope because they will have a bright future. People of all ages will have high aspirations, great confidence and the skills and opportunities they need to succeed. People will be healthy, able to find work and will enjoy living here. Our reputation for excellence in service to communities will be widely recognised and South Tyneside will be playing a full role in contributing to a thriving and prosperous region.'

The Council and its partners understand the scale of the social, economic and environmental challenges and opportunities facing the area and have used these to galvanise the agenda for change.

- 28 The Council's and its partners' ambitions are reflected in clear themes which underpin the vision. There are six themes agreed with partners and government as part of the Local Area Agreement negotiation, and a seventh theme of resources added by the Council to drive its internal agenda. The six partnership wide themes are: culture and wellbeing; children and young people; safer and stronger communities; independent and healthy lives; jobs and enterprise and; housing, environment and transport. Ambitions are clear, for example, the ambitions for jobs and enterprise are that 'everyone who can and wants to work can find a job that fits their personal circumstances'. The process for developing and agreeing the vision, themes and what they mean in South Tyneside was meticulous. Clarity around the vision and ambitions ensures that partnership working focuses the passion of all parties to succeed.

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

- 29** Challenging long-term objectives have been agreed through the SCS to provide focus on addressing the socio-economic issues arising from the area's industrial decline. Each of the themes underpinning the vision is supported by a range of such objectives which cascade into partnership plans and the Council's corporate plan. Outcome targets have been agreed in pursuit of the vision, that by 2020 South Tyneside will have: grown population to at least 152,030; matched the government's target of 40 per cent of population having a level 4 qualification; built at least an additional 6,615 homes; matched the national average life expectancy age of 82 years for men and 85 for women; an employment rate of at least 76 per cent; and reduced carbon emissions to 4.9 tonnes per person. These targets represent stretching goals for the Council and its partners. For example the current employment rate is only 69.6 per cent. Clarity around long term ambitions ensures more effective prioritisation.
- 30** The ambitions are grounded in a clear understanding of wider social and economic factors and a detailed understanding of neighbourhoods. This is based on robust intelligence through access to a well developed and excellent joint web-based database, 'Intelligence on Line', that is hosted by the Council and is widely available to partner organisations and the public. The system ensures that demographic and socio-economic information gathered by the Council and its partners is converted into good intelligence. This is then used to develop ambitions and plans for the community, areas and neighbourhoods. Over time the system has built up a detailed picture of South Tyneside's 71 neighbourhoods. As a result partners are able to work together on the basis of reliable, common intelligence to develop and implement the long-term vision and more short-term action planning.
- 31** The Council engages well with its communities and communicates decisions about its ambitions. It uses a range of consultation methods. Its nationally recognised 'we asked; you said; we did' campaign has been used to great effect by the Council and its partners in telling local communities how they are responding to their concerns. For example, in responding to feedback around the lack of local jobs the Council secured significant external funding and set about a programme of job creation which has resulted in a high proportion of new jobs going to local people. The 'we asked; you said; we did' campaign has now been adopted and used across Tyne and Wear and more widely. The Council understands how its own services and activities can contribute to improving the lives for local people, and local people are clear about their ambitions for South Tyneside.
- 32** The Council has established robust arrangements to ensure the needs of minority communities are taken into account in setting its ambitions. For example, through service level agreements with communities of common interest, it maximises opportunities to work with partners such as faith and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups and makes decisions based on their feedback. The Council has also deployed innovative participatory appraisal techniques that have trained and used local people to engage with the communities they know best. This approach, for example, helped the Council to successfully engage with a number of asylum seekers through local citizenship sessions. As a result these groups can directly influence and feed into the setting of the Council's ambitions and that these ambitions recognise the range and complexity of their needs.

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

- 33** Strong, effective and sustainable partnership working is in place in South Tyneside. The shared ownership of ambitions through the LSP, the Council and its staff as 'one team' results in a strong commitment and focus on delivery. The 'one team' partnership are aware of what the vision and themes mean in the context of South Tyneside as they were actively engaged in agreeing them. A series of 'Innovation Days' has been used to ensure vision is turned into reality, for example, to identify key medium term projects which then informed the allocation of Area Based Grant (ABG). The Council is seen by partners and stakeholders as an exemplary partner. The leadership input and contribution of the Council is universally appreciated by all LSP members and has been instrumental in forging the strong partnership working at this level as recognised by beacon status for Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements being awarded to South Tyneside. The energy created around local partnership working is ensuring innovative solutions to realising ambitions such as a successful joint partnership bid for Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) funding, the only successful partnership bid in the country.
- 34** The Council provides excellent community leadership. The Chief Executive and senior councillors champion the needs of local communities at national, regional and local level, and celebrate their successes. The Chief Executive, for example, chairs the Tyne and Wear Public Service Board. The Leader of the Council is a member of the European Union Committee of the Regions and has chaired the Local Government Association Urban Commission. Ward councillors play a crucial role in championing the needs and concerns of their communities and ensuring effective partnership working at a local level. Local people see councillors as providing strong community leadership in their wards and have a high regard for their work in engaging communities. The Council recognises the role played by all stakeholders in making a difference to local communities through the 'Pride of South Tyneside Awards' which recognise the contribution of individual members of the community in roles such as carers and role models. The awards promote a strong feeling of place and support community cohesion. Effective leadership and good partnership working locally means the Council is better able to deliver planned outcomes in response to the needs of local communities.
- 35** The Council takes difficult decisions in pursuit of its ambitions. Its decision to select a strategic partner to provide a range of back office services and secure additional local jobs is good evidence of this. The process to select a partner and sign the ten-year contract has required strong political commitment throughout. The Council routinely consults on issues and where possible achieves consensus, but it sticks to decisions it believes are in the best interests of the area, such as plans for a hotel as part of the development of the Foreshore which was the subject of strong local opposition.

Prioritisation

- 36** The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. Through an inclusive approach to developing and agreeing shared priorities, the Council and its partners ensure action and resources are committed in pursuit of ambitions. Prioritisation is supported by good strategic planning and effective target setting to cascade from the vision to delivery both within the Council and the wider partnership. Strong intelligence means action is developed both strategically and at a neighbourhood level to ensure a focus on closing the gap between the most and least deprived areas within South Tyneside. Clarity around the recently agreed LAA 'must shift' priorities is still being embedded throughout the partnership and not all supporting plans, targets and processes are in place to ensure focus is maintained.
- 37** There are clear and challenging priorities which flow from the ambitions for South Tyneside. The long-term objectives underpinning the SCS are further refined into short and medium priorities within the current and previous community strategies. Through this the Council and its partners have recently identified the top ten most important 'must shift' priorities for the next three years as part of the LAA process. These have formed the medium term priorities of the Council and its partners. The priorities are:
- increasing opportunities and participation in education, employment and training;
 - improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people;
 - build respect in communities and reducing anti-social behaviour;
 - engage people to have a greater voice and influence over decision making and local service delivery;
 - improve the health and wellbeing of older people;
 - reduce health inequalities by reducing smoking, alcohol misuse and obesity;
 - reduce the gaps in employment and benefit claimant rates between the worst performing neighbourhood and national averages;
 - improve housing conditions and quality across all tenures to meet the Decent Homes Standard;
 - reduce waste to landfill and increasing recycling to help reduce our carbon footprint; and
 - promote culture and wellbeing so that everyone can be the best that they can be.

Priorities flow readily into the Council's and its partners' strategic plans providing a clear framework for delivery. The process for developing the 'must shift' priorities was inclusive through 'one team' and informed by the clarity of ambition, good community engagement and strong intelligence. Developing a small number of key priorities provides the Council and its partners with a much clearer focus on delivery.

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

- 38 The Council's strategic and service planning process is good. A disciplined planning framework ensures the focus on priorities is maintained through 'Performing Together', the Council's strategic plan and its suite of thematic and service plans. Service priorities are set within a clear corporate framework and managers understand how they link together. Individual target setting, through the Personal Development Plan (PDP) process, means that the majority of staff from the Chief Executive down have individual performance targets to support delivery of the priorities agreed and monitored. Clarity around the new LAA 'must shift' priorities are still being embedded throughout the partnership. Not all supporting plans and targets are in place with PDPs and regular staff reviews are not robustly undertaken at all levels of the organisation to ensure focus and clarity around priorities. The planning process ensures that the Council is focused on effectively delivering improved outcomes for local people.
- 39 Strategies and plans are generally robust, incorporate feedback, reflect changing needs and are supported by challenging targets. The Council's strategies and service plans to deliver the priorities are mostly in place. The Council is delivering 14 'Four Star plus' projects to support the delivery of the 'must shift' priorities. Indicators are identified against priority objectives with medium term targets agreed where baseline data is available. Agreed targets are challenging, such as reducing Council carbon emissions by 20 per cent by March 2011. This enables the Council to consistently improve its performance over time and maintain high levels of performance in key areas.
- 40 Service and financial planning frameworks show increasingly effective links. 'Performing Together' provides the link between the priorities and the allocation of resources, including the MTFs. The annual process for allocating resources to priorities is effective and evolving; for example the Council's financial planning around capital is not clearly linked to its priorities but this process is currently being revised. Every year the Council asks local communities to identify priorities and spending preferences. This in turn informs the budget. The 2008/09 budget was set at the lower option of keeping Council Tax levels below 3 per cent (the lowest increase for over ten years). This approach is ensuring that decisions on priorities and resources are becoming more closely aligned.
- 41 Effective and decisive action takes place, by the Council and its partners, through 'one team' to deliver against shared priorities. Partners have a clear focus on the shared priorities they have established and work together and support each other to improve outcomes for local people. Partners have changed their behaviour to meet each others needs and have worked together to develop solutions which will simultaneously address a number of priority issues. The funding by the Police for a guaranteed apprenticeships scheme is excellent evidence of this and ensured young people were given the opportunity to develop their skills and enhance their life chances.

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

- 42 The Council makes good use of local communities to help develop action planning and monitor the results. Neighbourhood action plans have been developed in 14 of the 19 most deprived wards. Participatory appraisal techniques have enabled the Council to engage with local communities to understand their issues and develop solutions. For example the Horsley Hill neighbourhood action plan was developed through consultation with local people who identified key local issues. This led to actions, such as environmental improvements and the provision of community transport. As a result, plans have a high level of local ownership and improved chances of success.
- 43 Engagement and involvement has informed priorities for BME communities and those at risk of disadvantage. The Council is working in partnership with representatives of minority and disadvantaged groups, such as the Commission for Racial Equality for South Tyneside (CREST) and the Older People's forum to address equality and diversity. The Council's approach to promoting financial inclusion and tackling indebtedness included a specific focus on diverse communities, such as the Muslim community. Adult and community learning services have a clear focus on the hard to reach groups. A wider range of family learning opportunities has resulted in a more than doubling of the numbers participating in activities.
- 44 The Council communicates priorities effectively. Externally, the use of communication campaigns and regular high quality Council newsletter ensure that priorities are well communicated. Internally, a range of mechanisms including staff newsletters and the intranet are used to communicate. Directorates have developed notable additions to the corporate tools, for example, 'Grapevine' sessions in Neighbourhood services that offer key staff the opportunity to meet every four to six weeks to discuss common issues and debate progress against priorities. Communities and staff are clear what the Council are trying to achieve.

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

Capacity

- 45 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. The Council and its partners are adept at maximising their capacity through the 'one team' culture and ensuring success is recognised and celebrated. Managing in a tight financial context has required the Council to do things differently and make good use of partnership working with public, private and voluntary sector, adopt an open approach to procurement and make good use of external funding. Senior councillors often lack clarity around their strategic roles and Scrutiny is not sufficiently proactive in review and challenging performance or examining executive decisions once they are made. The use of ICT to support some services has been slower to develop than planned. The Council delivers good value for money (VfM) with a strong strategic commitment and focus but VfM is not yet a key driver across all services.
- 46 The Council is making excellent and innovative use of partnerships to enhance capacity. The Council is aware of its own capacity and ensures that it develops appropriate partnership arrangements to make best use of partners' expertise. Strong working relationships have supported improved outcomes for local people and the Council is supporting voluntary and community organisations to improve their capacity strategically and as service providers. Partners have developed a number of joint initiatives which have made best use of combined resources in delivering agreed priorities. For example, the recycling village includes community education facilities and a shop in partnership with Groundwork which has created job opportunities for local people. The Council is open to developing innovative solutions, such as its strategic partnership, to enhance capacity.

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

- 47 Senior officers of the Council provide good leadership to the organisation. The Chief Executive provides strong and clear leadership; she is highly regarded both internally and externally. The senior management team and heads of service are encouraged and empowered to innovate and seek cross cutting solutions through the 'one team' culture. Senior officers create a strong link between strategic and operational management and provide a culture whereby staff can develop and innovate. Staff are passionate about improving services for local people, have a clear sense of purpose and have developed strong links across directorates and with partners to maximise capacity through co-ordination and joint working. The Council celebrates its successes and those of its employees, supporting a culture of innovation and excellence. Staff are kept informed of, and involved with, the Council's successes through the regular staff newsletter, 'Team Talk'. The 'Big Thank You' awards provide recognition for individual members of staff. Strong leadership ensures staff to feel valued and that there is a can do ethos throughout the organisation.
- 48 Workforce planning is developing well and has been effective in a number of key areas. The Council is working well with partners to develop capacity through its leadership development programme, which is also available to the voluntary sector. Its flexible approach to absence management, including 'Stuck not Sick', has helped reduce sickness absence, from an average of 12.58 days per person in 2003/04 to 10.20 days in 2007/08. Training and development for staff is evaluated and clearly linked to delivering improvement through PDPs. Succession planning is a key feature of the Council planning and it has invested in additional management capacity, through creating assistant heads of service across the organisation, to support innovation and develop management potential. Most service plans identify the financial and staffing resources necessary to drive service improvement and in particular skills and workforce retention issues. A good example of this is the programme to 'grow your own' social workers which has eliminated children's social care vacancies. As a result the Council is able to make best use of existing capacity and to identify opportunities to develop capacity further.
- 49 Corporate governance arrangements are effective. The Chief Executive and Council Leader are both well regarded and provide significant drive and leadership. Leadership by senior councillors ensures sound and ethical management of the Council. There are positive working relationships between officers and lead members who meet regularly. Councillors of all political groups generally work well together for the good of local communities. This is supported by a good approach to councillor training and development. Responsibility for decision making is clear with most executive decisions delegated to officers. Senior councillors' grasp of strategic issues is variable compared to their knowledge and understanding of the issues in their neighbourhoods. Some lack clarity of executive roles and responsibilities, such as delegated powers. Overall the arrangements in place support effective leadership by officers and councillors.

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

- 50 The Council has a good approach to building in diversity and equality in all its services and activities. It responds positively to the diverse needs of the community and its workforce. Its strategy 'Fair to all...personal to each' is having an impact. The Council is at level 3 of the Equalities Standard for Local Government and is working actively towards achieving level 4. Equality Impact Assessments are carried out for all services. The Council has used a variety of means to tackle issues of diversity, such as employee support groups. It has a BME forum and has used DVDs, developed by young local filmmakers, to tackle issues of disability and sexuality. The Council and its partners have made significant progress in ensuring the principles of equality and diversity are mainstreamed across services.
- 51 The Council uses procurement effectively. It has an open approach to procurement and is willing to do things differently. It has made over £3 million of procurement savings and entered into partnerships with both the private sector and neighbouring councils, in areas such as street lighting, waste collection, treatment and disposal and Building Schools for the Future. Services are outsourced in a number of areas. The Council is currently reviewing its procurement strategy in light of the new back office strategic partnership as the partner will take responsibility for the delivery of the procurement function. A target for procurement savings has been guaranteed through the strategic partnership contract. These initiatives have increased the Council's capacity.
- 52 The Council delivers good VfM. The Council has maintained a clear focus on the efficiency agenda. It has made £15.2 million of savings, which is 44 per cent above its agreed national target. Most services demonstrate a good focus on VfM for example, children's services has reduced reliance on expensive out of area placements for looked after children. It is not a key driver across all levels of the organisation, for example, measures to identify the cost effectiveness of provision are at an early stage of development within the youth service. The Council is aware of its areas of high costs. Its financial strategy is evolving to demonstrate closer links between resource allocation and key priorities as the medium term financial pressures will require a clear focus on priorities. Good VfM supports the capacity of the Council to deliver improvements in priority areas.
- 53 The Council has the financial capacity to meet its current commitments. Reserves are now maintained in line with assessed risk and the Council has a history of setting and delivering a balanced revenue budget. The Council has introduced an 'Invest to Save' fund as a mechanism for releasing potential financial savings, making them available for redirection to priorities. An initial project to rationalise transport has delivered £445,000 annual savings from an initial investment of £39,000 in the first year of the fund.
- 54 There is a clear and effective approach to risk management. The strategic risk and opportunity register contains the risks associated with the Council's key objectives and is reviewed by executive team and the audit committee every three months. A risk and opportunity register is maintained for each service, significant project or partnership. Actions to manage the risks and opportunities are included in Performing Together, theme plans and service plans. These risk management arrangements help to ensure that internal and external issues and pressures are identified and mitigation strategies put in place.

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

- 55 Scrutiny is underdeveloped. Scrutiny reviews are well targeted on policy development. Scrutiny has reviewed issues such as obesity and facilities for young people. Reports and recommendations are generally well received by Cabinet, for example, its work on anti-social behaviour. Scrutiny processes are well structured and contribute well to formulating policy; however, they have not yet adopted a clear role in challenge around executive decisions and performance matters.
- 56 The Council has clear and robust project management processes for appraisal, approval monitoring and review. The 'delivering together' toolkit sets out in simple accessible terms the processes and procedures that must be applied to all project work, including formal consideration of VfM and diversity. This framework has ensured key projects have been completed in line with expectations such as the four-star plus projects and the strategic partnership.
- 57 The Council and its partners are making adequate use of ICT to improve access to services. Development of the website has resulted in 172 services now being accessible on line and the choice based lettings service is now accessible via digital TV. Plans are progressing to develop a network of six one-stop customer service centres, providing integrated access to a range of partners' services. However, the first one did not become operational until August 2008. The use of ICT to facilitate mobile working and use of e-procurement is more limited. The strategic partnership is intended to improve capacity around ICT through investment of £13 million over the next ten years.

Performance management

- 58 The Council is performing strongly in this area. Performance management is an area of strength for the Council, and it performs well above minimum requirements. The Council has a clear and robust approach to performance management supported by effective strategies and systems, with clear responsibilities and strong leadership creating a performance management culture at all levels. Performance management with partners is strong at a strategic level, for example through the LSP, and within service delivery partnerships.
- 59 The Council has made good progress in embedding a performance management culture. The Council demonstrates strong leadership on performance management. Performance management is seen as an integral part of how managers work and they manage performance proactively rather than just monitoring. Senior officers set a strong example which staff at all levels follow and challenge performance routinely at an operational level. Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny receive detailed quarterly performance reports as do select committees. The Council has a track record of positive response to external assessment including inspections and Corporate Assessment. The Council responds swiftly to address performance issues.

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

- 60 There are systematic monitoring and review processes ensuring a strong track record of improvement. The Council has a mature and effective performance management system (PIMS) in place. There is a culture of open debate and constructive challenge, with performance reports co-ordinated and supported by corporate and service performance teams providing independent commentary on progress against targets for the regular monthly senior management team (SMT). Performance reports are comprehensive, covering objectives, priorities, delivery, staffing and financial issues. Managers use PIMS consistently and regularly to report on performance and identify areas for action. The use of performance information in addressing equalities and diversity is strong. A mature system and good culture has delivered strong performance improvement with 39 per cent of performance indicators (BVPIs) in the top quartile nationally in 2007/08, compared to an average of 30 per cent, and also an above average performance improvement rate year on year from a comparatively high base.
- 61 Performance monitoring at neighbourhood level is strong. Once a Neighbourhood Action Plan is finalised a Partnership Group is established to manage the plan. This includes councillors, residents and officers from the Council and partner organisations. The group has overall responsibility for monitoring the plan and receives a regular progress report. There is also a multi-agency sub-group for each priority theme within the plan and they monitor their actions in detail. Progress is fed back to the community through a partnership newsletter.
- 62 The Council uses performance information to focus attention on underperforming areas. Managers focus on what is important, especially where performance is not meeting the Council's own targets. Areas of good and poor performance are clearly highlighted in performance reports together with details of action being taken to address areas of under-performance. Where performance remains under target for three consecutive months, the Council initiates a 'performance clinic' chaired by senior councillors or managers. Clinics, such as the one on school attendance, included the PCT and external specialists. They also include a wider range of internal partners for example from communications, and draw on wider knowledge within the Council, for example to understand how air quality issues may affect pupils' health. Strong leadership and decisive action has resulted in improved performance with reduced school absences. Other examples include improving housing re-letting times and reducing the numbers of empty properties in conjunction with South Tyneside Homes. Swift and robust action takes place to ensure the Council stays on track.
- 63 Management of partnership performance is exceptional and seamless. The Council has helped to develop performance management for its key strategic partnerships, with both 'PIMS' and 'Intelligence On-Line' being available to partners. Performance and cost information are considered together and action is being taken to improve services where the costs are high, for example in children's residential care where expensive out of area placements have been reduced and investments made in fostering solutions within the borough. Cross-departmental working is well advanced and the corporate centre is able to co-ordinate this effectively through the performance management system. The Council is also working to develop more local control and influence over key 'quality of life' areas. Robust performance management is helping the Council and partners to improve services and achieve better value for money.

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

- 64 Performance management is integrated with resource management. High level links between activity and finances are in place and increasingly cascading throughout the organisation. The Council has an effective system of financial reporting that keeps it on track, and it has balanced its budget in each of the past three years. Financial reports to cabinet are supported and supplemented by service based reports to SMT, Departmental Management Teams (DMTs) and scrutiny. These set out clearly projected variations to budget and indicate what management action is proposed to deal with projected overspends.
- 65 The Council seeks actively to learn from its own performance and from others in order to continually improve. It makes extensive use of benchmarking information across all services and has internal forums for sharing good practice such as the Heads of Service Group. In addition it holds 'Innovation Days' involving partner organisations to generate and support improved service delivery. The Council learns and responds to customer feedback by services monitoring and reporting their complaints and respond appropriately. A stronger corporate focus on learning the lessons from customer complaints is been implemented. Attention is paid to communicating performance with regular feedback to service users through the Council's magazine, 'On-View'.

What has been achieved?

- 66 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. The Council, through clear priorities, strong partnership working and a culture of performance improvement, has made noticeable improvements to residents' quality of life during the last three years. Improvements are strongest in those areas which matter the most to local people and are priorities of the Council, such as creating jobs, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, and improving educational attainment. Results in these areas are good; with new businesses establishing in the area creating jobs for local people; levels of crime and anti-social behaviour reducing and the percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs grade A*- C improving significantly. Improvements such as these have resulted in South Tyneside improving from 15th to 38th most deprived borough nationally between 2002 and 2007.
- 67 Local people are clear about local ambitions and priorities. They understand the local context, the pressures the Council faces and, are supportive of the plans in place. An excellent example of this is in relation to decent homes. Delays in the ALMO achieving a satisfactory standard and releasing the required investment into the decent homes programme means that a revised target of 2014 has been set. Local people are clear about this revised target and understand that there is a programme in place which means some areas will have to wait beyond the original 2010 target for all social housing to meet the decent homes standard. This and similar approaches means that overall public satisfaction with the Council has improved, along with satisfaction with most services, including cleanliness, recycling facilities and open spaces. This reflects the Council's continuing emphasis on meeting local residents' priorities.
- 68 There is a clear focus on priorities to narrow the inequalities both between South Tyneside and nationally and, within South Tyneside itself. There has been success in narrowing the gap nationally such as educational attainment where performance at GCSE has gone from well below the national average to slightly above. A further notable example has been the approach to, and success in, reducing levels of teenage pregnancies. Teenage pregnancies were 40 per cent above national average in 1998. Through a strong partnership approach, a willingness to engage and work with young people and, targeting of resources South Tyneside rate of improvement is the second best nationally and the gap has been closed. Inequalities remain within South Tyneside, such as life expectancy, and the Council and its partners are focused on addressing these.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 69** The Council is clear about its role in supporting the local economy. It has been successful in creating employment opportunities and enabling local people to develop the skills to access them, supporting new businesses and attracting inward investment. After initial slow progress, the Council is now strengthening its approach to meet the housing needs of the borough. Major investment is being made to improve the quality of the housing stock, areas of low demand are being addressed and policies have been strengthened to increase the supply of affordable housing, although much remains to be done. Good progress has been made in tackling environmental issues. The Council has taken a strategic approach to climate change and is delivering improvements. Waste management is improving, although recycling levels remain below average, and there have been significant improvements in the public realm. The Council and its partners have increased public transport patronage and have taken a strategic approach to manage increasing traffic volumes.
- 70** The Council is making a clear contribution to improving the local economy through support to new and existing businesses and job creation. Since October 2006, the £16.2 million Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) has been used to create 173 new businesses and support 163 existing businesses, creating 1,389 new jobs and safeguarding 785 existing jobs. This has contributed to a significant narrowing of the gap between local and national employment rates in 2007. There is a clear focus on creating opportunities in the most deprived areas and for the most disadvantaged groups. The LEGI programme includes a number of projects focusing on the most deprived wards, and the Supported Employment Service is currently supporting 70 people with a learning disability and 79 with a physical disability in employment. The Steps to Excellence programme is training 60 job search advisors in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to support workless residents with mental health issues or low level depression. The Council is leading on an innovative skills gap audit through the North East Regional Efficiency and Improvement Partnership.
- 71** The Council has been successful in attracting new businesses to the area through its Major Business Grant Fund. Ten awards have been made which have helped to create 179 new jobs. The Council has helped to attract private sector leverage of £4.6 million. The Council is also using the physical regeneration of the borough to provide opportunities for local people, such as agreements with major developers include social clauses to ensure job opportunities and training for local people.

- 72** Progress is being made to ensure that housing provision meets the needs of local people, although much more needs to be done to improve the quality and availability of local housing. Only 40 per cent of housing met the decent homes standard. However, South Tyneside Homes has recently secured £167 million of government funding which the Council feels will ensure all housing meets the decency standard by 2013/14. The Council has also introduced agreements with private sector landlords to improve the standard of private sector housing. The Council is making progress in tackling areas of low demand through projects such as the Cleadon Park development. The proportion of low demand homes per thousand dwellings has fallen from 31.7 in 2003/04 to 16.2 in 2006/07, although this remains in the highest quartile nationally. The Council has taken action to accelerate supply of affordable housing by introducing planning policies requiring 25 per cent of new developments to be affordable housing, and has prepared a development brief for the redevelopment of Hebburn New Town requiring 50 per cent affordable housing.
- 73** The Council has made good progress towards its ambitions for a sustainable environment. It has made good progress to mitigate the impacts of climate change, leading by example by reducing CO2 emissions by 6,000 tonnes per annum through transport, lighting and energy efficiencies. This includes the installation of a wind turbine at the Middlefields depot which produces 24 per cent of the site's electricity. Initiatives to reduce carbon emissions across the borough include insulation and heating improvements to almost 3,000 properties, with a further 1,700 homeowners being referred to the Government's Warm Front Scheme. The redevelopment of Cleadon Park, which aims to reinvigorate the housing market in an area of previous low demand, includes measures to reduce carbon emissions, provide local health, leisure and retail facilities and encourage the use of public transport. The Council has also reduced levels of waste and increased recycling. The volume of waste collected has reduced each year since 2004/05 and is now below the national average. Kerbside recycling has been expanded, resulting in an increase to 28.2 per cent of municipal waste recycled in 2007/08, although this remains below the national average. There have been significant improvements in the local environment to support the physical regeneration plans of South Tyneside. Improved street cleanliness standards have resulted in improved public satisfaction. Improvements have been made to the major gateways to the borough, along with improvements to parks and public spaces, most notably the £5 million redevelopment of South Marine Park in South Shields. Items of public art are also used to create interest and promote the use of public spaces. These achievements all contribute towards an improved quality of life for local people.
- 74** The Council is working with partners to increase public transport usage and manage traffic volumes. The infrastructure for walking and cycling has also been improved. Various travel to work schemes and school travel plans, with a focus on safer routes, have been introduced, along with a cycling strategy to reduce car use and improve cycle networks. A new Metro station has opened within the borough and the rail network is enhanced by complementary bus networks. Usage of the Metro system has increased by 10 per cent over the last three years across Tyne and Wear although bus patronage fell slightly.

Safer and stronger communities

- 75** The Council has contributed effectively to achieving reduced levels of crime and anti-social behaviour across the borough. It provides effective political and managerial leadership to the Safer South Tyneside Group. It has taken a proactive approach to reducing crime and has focused on priority neighbourhoods with success as levels of crime and anti-social behaviour have reduced overall and in key hot spots. Progress has also been made on the stronger communities' agenda and approach to emergency planning, although there has been less progress on reducing the numbers of people injured in road accidents.
- 76** There is good partnership working on community safety at both a strategic and local neighbourhood level. The community safety partnership, Safer South Tyneside Group, is effective with good shared intelligence and joint area tasking. Governance structures are complex but ensure stakeholders are appropriately engaged. Although community safety issues are generally recognised in the planning and delivery of Council services, responsibilities, responsibilities under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 are not sufficiently widely understood. The Council works with its partners both at a local and borough level to ensure that tasks to address crime and anti-social behaviour are allocated appropriately. This occurs through four operational multi agency groups with overlapping membership that, while apparently complex, nevertheless have delivered results. For example, joint tasking arrangements identified increases in criminal damage, fire raising and anti-social behaviour during the end of October Halloween period. In response, partners introduced 'Mischief Week' and took steps to introduce diversionary activities, (including free swimming), the removal of illegal bonfires and a tough stance on firework licensing which resulted in significant reductions in crime, anti-social behaviour and bonfire calls.
- 77** The Safer South Tyneside Group's approach to tackling crime and promoting community safety is effective, achieving significant results. Crime in South Tyneside has fallen by 27 per cent between 2003/04 and 2007/08 with significant reductions recorded in most crime categories, with the notable exception of common assault. The partnership has successfully targeted initiatives and achieved its Public Service Agreement (PSA) target; for example, on the Horsley Hill estate where there has been a 65 per cent drop in recorded crime over the last three years.
- 78** The Council and its partners have made good progress in tackling domestic violence but it is too early to see the impact of these measures. Partners have worked together to implement a range of co-ordinated initiatives. For example, the level of refuge provision in the borough has been increased, a sanctuary scheme has been introduced to safeguard victims in their own homes and a directory of local services has been produced to ensure victims can access services. This has resulted in more effective support to victims of domestic violence; however the level of domestic violence remains above average.

- 79 There is a clear and effective approach to tackling anti-social behaviour. South Tyneside is a 'Respect Action Area' and the anti-social behaviour task force has worked alongside other partners to improve performance. A recent survey found that 28 per cent of people in the borough believe there is a high level of anti-social behaviour, down from 49 per cent in 2004, the largest reduction in Tyne & Wear. The 'one team' culture has resulted in Council services contributing effectively to the anti-social behaviour agenda. Cultural services have supported a drive to reduce youth unemployment by offering sports apprenticeships, and 67 per cent of participants have moved to full or part time jobs. Overall fear of crime has fallen since 2002 with a 4 per cent increase in people feeling safe during the day and after dark and 3 per cent improvement for those at home in the day and seven per cent improvement for those at home alone after dark.
- 80 Progress on retaining people in drug treatment is improving and partners have made good progress in this area. The partnership is on track to achieve its current retention target of 83 per cent with numbers in treatment currently five per cent above the national average. The Council and partners have also achieved significant gains in the number of young people entering and remaining in drug treatment.
- 81 The Council can demonstrate some progress towards building stronger communities. Some successful initiatives have promoted stronger and more cohesive communities. The Pride of South Tyneside Awards and inter-generational activities promote a strong sense of community pride and spirit. The 'Tell-us' survey shows that children and young people in South Tyneside feel safe. The Community Cohesion Strategy sets out a vision, themes for activity and objectives that show a clear policy direction for the authorities work in this area. The Council has beacon status for 'Neighbourhood and Community champions: the role of elected members'. Targeted initiatives have increased the number of young people registered to vote, and the numbers actually voting. For example the proportion of 18-year-olds voting rose to 23.3 per cent in 2008, compared with 21.1 per cent in 2006. There is a COMPACT with the third sector and evidence of excellent work with community organisations to tackle financial exclusion and environmental issues. The approach to tackling race related crime is underpinned by effective partnership working, however racially aggravated crime is increasing.
- 82 The Council and partners have been effective in reducing accidents. For example the Tyne and Wear fire service undertook 2000 home fire risk assessments during 2007/08 and in partnership with South Tyneside Homes fitted 7,500 smoke detectors. The number of dwelling fire is reducing. There was an increase, from 44 to 59, of people being killed or seriously injured on the roads in 2007/08, of which 12 were children. However, the numbers of people slightly injured on the roads in 2007/08 was down to 375, a significant improvement from the previous year. The overall trend has seen a reduction in accidents over the last three years.

What has been achieved?

- 83** Emergency planning and business continuity frameworks are in place and fit for purpose. The Council has effective arrangements for responding to emergency situations. It is an active participant in the local resilience. It works with the Tyne and Wear Emergency Planning Unit to co-ordinate exercises and training for key officers and members. With partners, the Council has responded effectively to recent incidents of flooding and has secured external funding to improve flood defences in a particular local 'hotspot'. There are specific action plans in place to deal with other potential incidents such as the hazard presented by a local fuel terminal.

Healthier communities

- 84** The Council and its partners have had some success in improving the health of local communities, particularly in relation to smoking cessation and teenage pregnancies. Health inequalities continue to be an issue within South Tyneside, although the partners' approach is focused on the main issues which impact on inequalities, such as obesity, alcohol misuse and mental health.
- 85** The Council and its partners have had some success in improving life expectancy and closing the gap on the national average although significant inequalities remain within South Tyneside. Over the last four years, male life expectancy has increased by 1.6 years to 75.2 years, closing the gap on the national average. Female life expectancy has also improved by 0.6 years to 80.1 years, although without narrowing the gap on the national average.
- 86** There have been notable successes in some priority areas, although much remains to be done. Stop smoking services are amongst the most effective in the country. Since 2004/05, 37 per cent more people have accessed services to support them in quitting smoking. In 2006/07, 1,500 people had quit smoking after four weeks, an increase of 200 since 2004/05. However, rates of smoking by pregnant women remain persistently high. The rate of reduction in teenage pregnancies is the second best in the country. The conception rate has fallen from 64.9 per 1,000 in 1998 to 40.5, showing an overall reduction of 37.6 per cent. After being significantly higher than the national average, the inequality gap between South Tyneside and the rest of the county has now closed.
- 87** Initiatives to address obesity by increasing levels of physical activity have been successful. The MEND (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition and Do It) programme provides education on nutrition and behavioural change and the Mini-MEND programme, one of five national pilots, targets childhood obesity. The number of people accessing local advisory services provided by the Council's Choosing Health team has more than doubled since 2005/06. The Council's Let's Do It campaign has also resulted in a significant increase in the use of leisure facilities. The Junior Gym project features a range of cardiovascular and resistance training equipment catering for young people aged between eight and 15 years of age. The facility has recorded 800 registrations and allows users to monitor their progress via the Internet. There are increasing levels of physical activity, above the national average, and this is promoting more healthy lifestyles.

- 88** The Council has a very successful Healthy Schools Programme with participation in the healthy schools initiative the second best nationally. The school meals service has a strong focus on healthy eating and, at 68 per cent; take up is one of the highest in the country.
- 89** The Council and its partners have also taken action to address the high levels of alcohol misuse by young people in the borough. The award winning Think Drink Programme has continued with alcohol awareness sessions being held in schools, reaching around 1,500 children. A programme of innovative activity to tackle underage sales, undertaken by Trading Standards, has been recognised as a model of national good practice.
- 90** The Council and its partners have also been successful in implementing initiatives to address the priority for improving mental health. As part of the Healthy Schools Programme, the Council, the Primary Care Mental Health Team and the Samaritans have completed a pilot of the Developing Emotional Awareness and Learning (DEAL) resource. An Emotional Resilience Programme is also being delivered to local secondary schools, involving 2,000 children and 200 teachers over a three-year period. There is a range of targeted services for people with dementia, learning disabilities and mental health problems. People with learning disabilities are supported to access community-based activities such as training, exercise and healthy living programmes.
- 91** The Council and its partners have a particular focus on improving access to services for those at most risk of disadvantage and have achieved some success. Organisations such as CREST and Apna Ghar are engaged to ensure programmes to address specific health risks such as cardio-vascular disease, obesity and diabetes are culturally sensitive. Apna Ghar is also involved in promoting the well-being of minority communities through its successful Ethnic Minority Women's Centre. Projects to increase levels of physical activity include a particular focus on people with disabilities and women, particularly those from BME backgrounds. There are also concessionary schemes to enable marginalised groups to access leisure activities. The take up of direct payments has increased by 135 per cent between 2004 and 2008, and the Council provides good support to carers, including an annual conference, an emergency service and carers respite vouchers.

Older people

- 92** The Council and its partners have developed a strategic approach to achieving ambitions for older people which goes beyond care needs to consider their wider independence and quality of life. There are well-developed processes for engaging older people and their views are taken into account in policy development and service delivery. The Council and its partners work well together to provide a co-ordinated range of services which meet the wider needs of older people and reflect the diversity of the older population.

What has been achieved?

- 93** There is a good multi agency approach to older people. The Council and its partners launched their Older People's Strategy, 'All Our Tomorrows' in early 2008. This considers the anticipated increases in the older population and takes account of the seven dimensions of independence of older people. Actions to address the needs of older people are clearly linked to community priorities and other related strategies and involve a range of council services and other partners including the voluntary and community sector. A sub-group of the LSP, jointly chaired by the Council and the PCT, is responsible for delivery of the strategy which will ensure older peoples' needs and views are taken into account.
- 94** There is a clear focus on the needs of older people. The Council has appointed an older peoples' champion to raise the profile of older peoples' issues and promote a more coherent approach to meeting their needs. Partnership working is strong, both across services within the Council, with voluntary sector organisations such as Age Concern and with other public sector partners such as the PCT, the police and fire. Effective leadership and partnership working has ensured a clearer and inclusive focus on the borough's aging population, for example, including home safety advice and health checks as part of established events.
- 95** Arrangements for engaging with older people are good. Forum 50, the older peoples' engagement group, has a membership of 120 and ensures older peoples' views are taken into account on all issues affecting them, including the Council's budget and plans for transport within the borough. It has also taken part in three intergenerational debates with South Tyneside Youth Parliament. The group is also represented on the Council's Equality and Diversity Board. Links with BME communities have been developed through Apna Ghar and CREST. Activities include a BME elders' luncheon club and the LAA includes a stretch target to increase direct payments take up by BME communities. Effective engagement enables older people to shape the services they receive.
- 96** There are a range of activities which cater for the wider needs of older people. An annual Older People's Festival takes place in partnership with voluntary and community groups. This year's festival includes coach trips, a river cruise, a concert and tea dance, as well as access to a broader range of advice. Older people are also actively engaged in residents groups based at community centres across the borough, organising and participating in a range of activities. These include trips, theatre visits, dance classes and training courses. These residents groups also provide a support network for older people, many of whom live on their own. These activities enable older people to live active and independent lives.
- 97** Older people are engaged in a range of good inter-generational activities to increase respect and understanding of younger people. These include 'Handing on History' workshops as a way of handing on the culture, traditions and experiences of older people, and the inter-generational allotment project which succeeded in bringing people together as well as providing a source of affordable, healthy food. Older people have also worked alongside school and youth groups to create community gardens at Hartleyburn and North Marine Park, and to redevelop the green space surrounding the Boldon Newtown day centre.

- 98** Significant improvements have been made in care services for vulnerable older people, with two-thirds of Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) indicators being in the top two bands. Through the development of specialist domiciliary, residential, extra care and intermediate care services, the independence of older people has been improved. The number of older people helped to live at home has increased by 22 per cent since 2004, along with a 10 per cent increase in those aged under 65. Intermediate care is good. Delayed hospital discharges are low, and there have also been improvements in the speed of assessment and implementing care packages. The Council, in partnership with church volunteers provides a 'happy at home' befriending service to support older people who are not eligible for care services to live independently at home. The Council is developing the 'Opening Cultural Doors' project which will use leisure, arts, libraries and community centres to engage older people in activities to support their general well-being. Social care provision support improved quality of life.
- 99** The Council's approach to improving the health of the community includes activities which focus on the specific needs of older people. For example, volunteers offer telephone support using cognitive behavioural therapy to identify and address issues faced by isolated older people and also raise awareness of mental health issues in BME communities. This ensures initiatives target the specific needs of older people.
- 100** The Council has been awarded Beacon status for its partnership approach to financial inclusion and tackling indebtedness, which focuses mainly on older people, including older women and BME elders. A dedicated welfare rights team also provides targeted support to older people, making outreach visits to sheltered accommodation and day centres to give advice. As a result, benefit take up increased, with an additional £4.2 million of benefits being paid in 2007/08.
- 101** The Council is making good use of its Supporting People programme to enable vulnerable older people to live independently. Overall it funds 124 services that provide support to older people. This includes 64 units of extra care housing within three sheltered housing blocks and specific services to support frail elderly people. The programme has had a 2.3 per cent increase in users since 2003, compared with a 16 per cent reduction over the same period nationally.
- 102** Assistive technology is being progressed through the implementation of the national telecare initiative, and a number of solutions are being piloted. Since the launch of the scheme in 2007 there has been an increase in falls detectors with a falls prevention nurse providing individual sessions and group work in partnership with Age Concern.

Children and young people

- 103** Outcomes for children and young people in South Tyneside are good. Action taken by the Council and its partners to improve the health and well-being of children and young people are outstanding. Safeguarding arrangements are secure and good work is undertaken to support families and children in times of need. A good and clear focus on school improvement has ensured that the educational attainment and progress of the majority of pupils is at least satisfactory and improving. Children and young people who are looked after or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good services which result in positive outcomes for them.

What has been achieved?

- 104** Service management in South Tyneside is good. The Council and its partners are delivering improving outcomes for most children and young people. This is achieved through strong partnership working, using effective information and an agreed framework to deliver a common vision that is shared with and owned by partners. Clear plans and strategies and good performance management systems and practices are generally in place to ensure these are delivered. While there are inconsistencies in some areas, such as aspects of the management of the youth offending service, the Council is aware of these and has the capacity and commitment to tackle them.
- 105** The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is outstanding. Very good partnership working with the Primary Care Trust, schools and youth services is making a positive difference to the physical, emotional and mental health of children and young people. Improving the emotional resilience of children is a high priority and many schools access counselling and other programmes to support pupils' emotional well-being. Very good local actions have ensured a significant reduction in teenage conception rates. At 37.6 per cent, this is the second best rate of reduction in the country.
- 106** The Council and its partners have ensured appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place for children and young people. Strong preventative partnership working and collaboration ensures the council takes early action and provides good, timely support to children and families. Children and young people are provided with a safe environment in children's homes, foster homes, schools and nurseries. All children subject to a child protection plan have a qualified social worker and all child protection conferences and reviews are held on time. Despite these good measures, the number of children subject to a child protection plan has, until very recently, continued to rise. There is an adequate response to the vetting and checks for adults working with children. All enhanced criminal records bureau (CRB) checks are in place, although the quality of information held on personnel files is variable.
- 107** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. The attainment of seven, 11 and 14 year olds continues to improve, and in 2007 attainment was above that of similar areas and in line with that found nationally. There has been an impressive rise in standards attained by 16 year olds from 2005 to 2007. The percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C improved from well below the national average to slightly above. Local data shows an increasing trend for 2008. Looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve at least satisfactorily and make similar progress to that of their peers when taking account of their starting points. The exception is the proportion of care leavers achieving five good GCSEs which, although improving, remains too low.

- 108** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society was judged outstanding in the 2007 APA and actions continue to build on the good work in place. There is a strong culture of seeking the views of young people and involving them in decision-making. Their views have informed the work on the Children and Young People's Plan and its recent update. Effective work by the youth service, schools, voluntary sector partners and others helps build opportunities to make a positive contribution. All vulnerable young people, such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked after children, contribute to their reviews effectively and are fully involved in informing service and higher level planning that affects them.
- 109** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. Although slow to develop, a good and coherent 14 to 19 partnership is in place with strong plans for the future. Reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training is a key priority of the Council. While still above the national average, there has been a year-on-year reduction and in 2007 the rate was 10.6 per cent, which is similar to comparable council areas. A good focus on young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has ensured the proportion who are not in education, employment or training has reduced well over the past three years. Good actions taken by Connexions and the leaving care team ensure a continuing high proportion of care leavers enter the world of education, employment or training.
- 110** The capacity of Council services to improve is good. This results from good strategic leadership and strong partnership working. Good financial management ensures a sustained focus on value for money at the strategic level but there is scope for this to become fully embedded at operational level. The Alliance has a good track record for improving services. It is developing a joint approach to workforce planning across all key partners including the voluntary and community sector, and in collaboration with neighbouring authorities in the sub-region. The council is open to learning from the best, from innovation and has a proven ability to learn from and implement the recommendations of internal and external review in order to continually improve practice.

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 South Tyneside 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

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

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As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

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