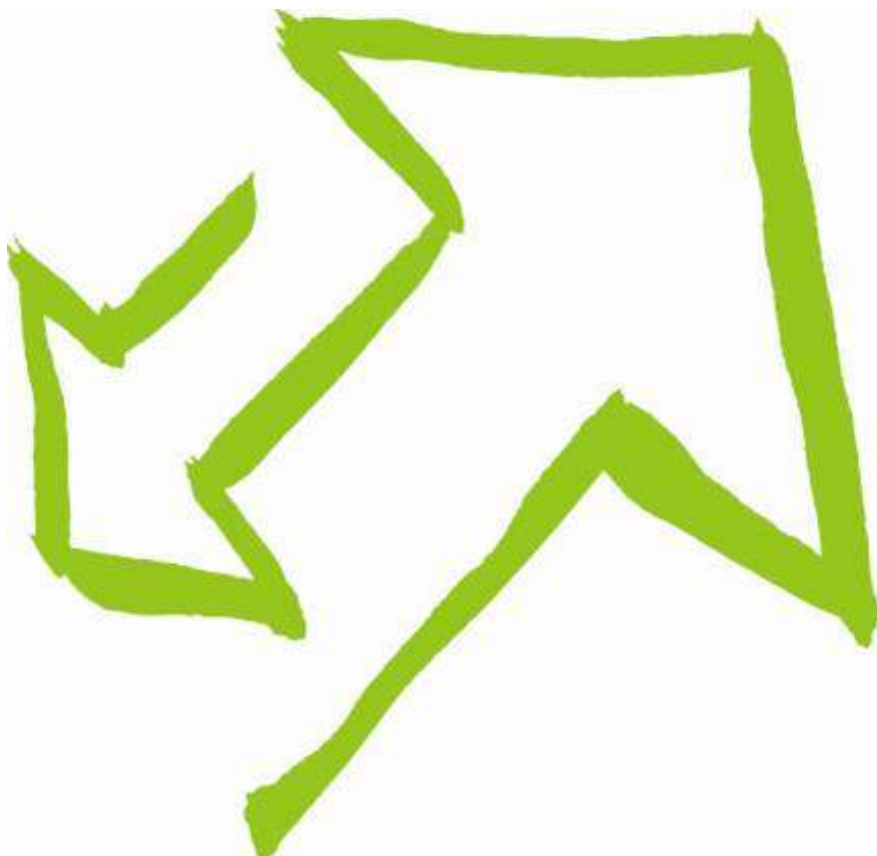


Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Weymouth and Portland Borough Council

February 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 and Improvement

Executive summary

- 3 In 2004, Weymouth and Portland Borough Council was judged as weak. It is now rated as good.
- 4 It has clear and challenging ambitions for the area, which are shared with its county-wide partners. It has developed a robust overarching vision, linked to the community plan which addresses the area's needs, particularly in terms of developing the local economy, meeting housing needs, and protecting the environment. This is supported by the community, partners, staff and councillors. Leadership and partnership working are strong, with effective examples of how the Council sustains and champions the needs of the area. It is still working on developing clearer targets to deliver the new community plan, addressing gaps in its knowledge on harder to reach groups, along with improving its poor image.
- 5 The Council's priorities are comprehensive and effectively balanced between regional and local issues. There is now a clear focus on addressing four key areas – the economy, housing, environment and being a well-managed Council – which is supported by appropriate strategies and generally robust action plans. The Council has a track record in linking its resources to these priorities, with disinvestment in non-priority areas. This helps the Council deliver its services targeted on users' needs.
- 6 The capacity and performance management of the Council are adequate in delivering what it is trying to achieve. Though there are significant financial constraints, financial management is good, with a positive track record in procurement, gaining external funding and securing value for money. The Council works well with partners to increase its capacity and to deliver shared objectives. Decision making is timely and transparent, with an effective committee structure; and scrutiny is developing. Human resources management is adequate, with a new staff structure underway to align the Council's services to its priorities. However, some councillors are not sufficiently engaged in regional and sub-regional partnerships and do not have the skills required to address the key strategic issues, which places a constraint on political capacity. Consideration of equality and diversity issues is fair, with recent internal improvements such as training and equality impact assessments underway. But delivery of equalities outcomes for the community has been delayed and an holistic approach to diversity and user focus has not yet been achieved.
- 7 Performance management is not systematic across the Council. Good progress has been made over recent years in developing a new framework, but this is not yet embedded. The new framework aligns the community plan to the council plan through departmental and individual work plans, but this is not fully operational, with some plans not yet linked to this framework and target setting still in development. Performance management of partnerships is inconsistent, with gaps in information, such as plans to jointly develop the economy. Councillor engagement with performance management is inconsistent and data analysis, particularly for some vulnerable groups, is weak. However, the Council has worked well to improve its customer services, and has good processes in place for managing complaints and comments, and making improvements to services as a result.

Executive summary

- 8 The Council is achieving well. It is delivering high quality services in its four priority areas which are improving people's quality of life, particularly for some specific disadvantaged groups such as the low-waged or those with housing needs. This is a significant achievement. There is a good track record in delivering outcomes for the economic benefit of the borough, such as assisting business start-ups and regeneration of the esplanade and former defence sites such as Osprey Quay. The Council is proactively securing economic benefits to the area from the 2012 Olympics. It has improved its priority of meeting the housing needs of the borough and is delivering an effective service in this area, such as meeting affordable homes targets and reducing homelessness. It performs well in protecting and improving the natural and built environment, with impressive achievements in waste and recycling. In many ways, it is achieving its priority of being a well-managed council, with a range of customer care improvements leading to better service for users. Much of the Council's work is delivered through effective partnership working delivering improvements in housing, community safety and increasingly for revenues and benefits services, although it has yet to demonstrate a track record of good performance in this particular area.
- 9 The Council's achievements are not always recognised by local people and are not well-targeted on some community groups. Service users do not readily recognise the quality of services that the Council delivers, and satisfaction rates remain poor - although they are improving. There is a weak strategic approach to harder to reach groups such as older people, black and minority ethnic communities or those in more deprived areas, and outcomes cannot be fully demonstrated for them.

Areas for improvement

- 10 The Council must accelerate its improvement in managing diversity and equalities and its strategic approach to meeting the needs of harder to reach groups. This includes older people, black and minority ethnic communities and those in deprived areas. It should build on the recent progress it has made in starting to deliver on its planned actions, including improving data collection and analysis. The effect of this work will ensure that the needs of vulnerable people and minority groups that are currently excluded are understood, considered and addressed.
- 11 The Council should prioritise improvements in its communication with the public. The current restructure and scrutiny review are an opportunity to ensure that consultation and engagement with community groups is high on the agenda, and that the communications strategy is implemented effectively. The effect of this should be to ensure that the public are well-informed and engaged with the Council's activities and that their views are heard and addressed. This should also help improve its image and satisfaction rates.
- 12 The Council needs to maximise the capability and capacity of its councillors. This should be done by addressing training needs to develop their wider understanding of strategic issues and performance management, as well as to recognise the impact their image can have on the perception of the Council. The strengths of some members can be used to develop others. This will make them more able to support the delivery of the strategic priorities of the Council.
- 13 The Council should build on its work in embedding performance management. This should include populating the new performance management system and ensuring that all service plans align to the corporate plan.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*	Weighted score
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3	6
	Prioritisation	3	6
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2	4
	Performance management	2	4
What has been achieved?	Achievement and Improvement	3	21
weighted score			41
CPA category			Good
<p>*Key to scores</p> <p>1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance</p> <p>2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance</p> <p>3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well</p> <p>4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly</p>			

**Banding thresholds for determining CPA category

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

Context

The locality

- 14 Weymouth and Portland is on the south coast of England in the county of Dorset. After Poole and Bournemouth, the town of Weymouth is the third largest in the sub-region and is within the 'Jurassic coast' world heritage site. The town is surrounded by the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The borough is a mix of built-up and, to a lesser extent, rural areas and includes the Island of Portland. The area is a popular tourist destination with demand for local services increasing particularly in the summer months. Visitors are attracted by the safe and clean bathing waters of Weymouth, the outstanding coastline, the uniqueness of Portland and increasingly the marine facilities available at the large waterfront site Osprey Quay, owned by the South West Regional Development Agency.
- 15 The borough has the highest deprivation within Dorset and ranks 127th out of 354 nationally, where 1 is the most deprived. Areas of particular deprivation include central Weymouth, Littlemoor, Westham and Fortuneswell.
- 16 The borough occupies an area of 42 square kilometres - making it one of the smallest districts in land area. With a population of 65,000, it is densely populated and during the summer months, enhanced by visitor numbers, the population increases significantly. The projected population growth rate, at eight per cent, is higher than regional and national averages.
- 17 Housing is in high demand and this is exacerbated by the significant number of second homes and holiday accommodation. There is a wide affordability gap between house prices and local wage rates and so housing growth is necessary to meet local demand.
- 18 Weymouth and Portland are popular retirement areas and the number of people over 60 is higher than the national average at 23 per cent although this remains lower than the Dorset average of 27 per cent. The population mix is predominantly white British with black and minority ethnic residents representing less than three per cent of the population, although there has been an increase in the number of European immigrants recently. The borough's residents are relatively healthy with a higher than national average life expectancy, although some health inequalities exist.
- 19 A significant proportion of jobs are in the tourism and service sectors and the economy is relatively low waged. Average income within the borough is £382 per week which is less than the regional figure of £478. Additionally, there is a significant level of part-time and seasonal work and high levels of commuting to work outside the borough. Previously, a significant part of the economy was based on defence related work. Marine industries continue to be important and, along with the London Olympic and Paralympic Sailing events in 2012, form a substantive part of the planned long-term term development of the borough.

Context

- 20 The borough represents a relatively high crime area when set against the Dorset perspective, but low when compared nationally. There has been an overall reduction in all types of crime since 2003/04 apart from violence against the person.

The Council

- 21 Until October 2008, Weymouth and Portland Borough Council has had no overall political control since 1980. There are 36 elected members and the political composition is now 19 Conservative, 10 Liberal Democrat, 4 Labour and 3 independent. The Conservative group now have a majority on the Council. The Council has adopted a 'fourth option' political management structure. This includes a politically proportionate management committee of ten brief holders who lead in priority areas. The management committee and the full council are the principal decision making bodies. The Council has a scrutiny and performance committee, a policy committee and an audit committee together with two regulatory committees which are planning and traffic and licensing. There is an independently chaired standards committee and a recently added harbour board.
- 22 The Council's officer structure is led by the Chief Executive and three corporate directors. Previously this was supported by ten service units and four corporate support services. At the time of our assessment, the management structure was undergoing review and the structure of three corporate directors and the unit managers is being replaced by six general manager posts reporting to the Chief Executive. This aims to better align delivery against the local strategic partnership and the Council's priorities.
- 23 The Council employs 430 full time equivalent staff - increasing by 25 per cent to 530 in the summer - with a gross expenditure for 2008/09 of £51.6 million and a revenue budget requirement of £11.5 million. The average council tax bill for band D in 2008/09 was set at £250.07 per year with a council tax increase of 3.69 per cent. The Council has a relatively low council tax base with the average being in band B.
- 24 The Council works with public, private and voluntary sector organisations in a range of different partnerships. These include the Dorset Strategic Partnership and Weymouth and Portland Partnership, both of which have wide ranging representation. In 2007, the Weymouth and Portland Partnership developed its second community plan 'Your Place, Our Future' for 2008-16, based on the overarching Dorset community strategy. Its themes are to improve: climate change; economy; environment; health and well being; housing, safer and stronger communities; learning, culture and the arts; accessibility; and the 2012 Olympic legacy. In 2006, the Council formed the Westwey Partnership with West Dorset District Council for the joint delivery of revenues and benefits services. It also works with the county and other Dorset districts as part of the pathfinder project, which aims to improve service delivery through joint working.
- 25 The Audit Commission assessed the Council as 'weak' in its comprehensive performance assessment in 2004. Since then the Council has worked with officials from the Government Office South West (GOSW), Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and other agencies including the Audit Commission to address identified weaknesses.

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

Ambition

- 26** The Council is performing well in this area. With its partners, it has developed clear and challenging ambitions for the area. These are set out in the Weymouth and Portland community plan developed in 2007 and link closely to the overarching Dorset-wide strategy and local area agreement. The Council's corporate plan has a strategic vision, based on the community plan which more specifically aims to: promote improvement in the local economy; meet the housing needs of the borough; protect and improve the natural and built environment; and to continue to be a well-managed council. These ambitions are both long-term and realistic, based on the needs of the local community, such as the need to address deprivation, build the marine economy and make the most of the Olympic legacy, as well as providing more affordable housing. This provides a good direction for the whole community to improve the well-being of the area.
- 27** The aims are consistent with those of county-wide partners, and shared among all major organisations in the area. They are well understood by staff and the local community, as the Council communicates its decisions and consults upon them in a variety of ways. Councillors, officers and partners are clear on their roles and are enthusiastic and committed to achieving these aims. The community is largely supportive and understanding of the Council's aims, particularly those around the regeneration of the area. This is true of the development of the seafront and Osprey Quay and in spite of some current disagreement over the development plans of the ferry terminal and pavilion area, there is general support for the need for its regeneration. Overall, local people are clear about what the Council and its partners are trying to achieve.
- 28** Ambitions are stretching and challenging, with clear aims to make a real difference to the community, especially for those at risk of disadvantage. For example, two of the four main aims concentrate on improving the income and skill levels for local people, as well as a concerted effort to improve the affordability of housing. Some of these ambitions, for example improving housing and benefits services in the shorter term, have already helped more vulnerable people. Ambitions are supported by substantive outcomes and targets. The Council is now working to develop SMART objectives for the new community plan through the local strategic partnership (LSP), for example, with clearer joint housing aims, along with joint waste and economy strategies for the area. The corporate plan contains clear links and shared aims from those in the community plan. Many of the objectives within these aims are longer term and sustainable, and have been developed with the support and backing of key partners, to ensure they are achievable.

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

- 29 The Council consults well with local people to inform its ambitions. It uses a wide variety of effective engagement mechanisms to understand the views of people. For example, it regularly consults on building a shared vision for the area, and holds a variety of meetings and events. As a result it has good awareness and understanding with which to develop its aims, such as for the proposed ferry terminal and pavilion area. It is good at communicating its aims and priorities both externally and internally. The Council is trying to communicate fully the issues facing this area, such as displays and newsletters and updates on the website about the pavilion - ferry terminal regeneration. Some local people retain a negative image of the Council, for example due to a 53 per cent increase council tax rise five years ago, but its current good engagement with the community is contributing to efforts to improve its reputation.
- 30 The Council uses the data to which it has access effectively, but has gaps in its baseline information on some harder to reach groups. The Council works closely with partners in analysing current available data, such as deprivation data, to develop ambitions for neighbourhoods, and this has helped form the basis for the joint economic strategy. It has a communications strategy which identifies the need to ensure harder to reach groups are better represented. These include smaller community groups or those from black and minority ethnic communities. However, the Council is aware of this shortcoming and has recently undertaken a thorough housing survey, has a detailed equality strategy in place and is making progress working with the County Council and other districts on improving statistics collection. Currently however, the views and needs of some groups may not be fully taken into account.
- 31 The Council demonstrates good leadership and effective partnership working. It provides robust leadership in examples ranging from the Westwey partnership, alternative service delivery models, regeneration projects with private companies, to voluntary local friends' groups. It is an active partner of the LSP as well as developing sub-regional plans, for example through the pathfinder project on waste. It supports the Dorset-wide strategic partnership, for example by taking an instrumental role in harnessing the legacy from the Olympic games and contributing towards LAA targets on affordable housing. Major partners such as the County Council and neighbouring districts are complimentary about the Council, and most agree that senior political and officer leadership is strong. Councillors have a track record in making difficult decisions that support the Council's aims, such as outsourcing leisure and supporting redevelopment plans. Overall, this leadership and effective partnering shows it is able to sustain and champion the needs of the area.

Prioritisation

- 32 The Council is performing well in this area. Its priorities are comprehensive and effectively balanced between national, regional and local issues. There is a clear focus on addressing four key areas which is supported by appropriate strategies, mostly fit-for-purpose action plans and linking its resources to these priorities. Some of these, such as developing the economy, are longer-term priorities based over the next ten to 15 years, whereas others, such as providing affordable housing, are being addressed immediately. This helps the Council deliver its services targeted towards users needs over both the shorter and longer term.

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

- 33** It has clear priorities to deliver its aims. It understands what matters to the area and has concentrated its efforts on this, with a sharp focus on economy, housing, the environment and being a well-managed council. These priorities are clearly linked to the overarching aims in the community strategy. Senior officers and politicians understand and have balanced sub regional priorities - such as developing the economy for the wider area in Dorset, with the needs of local communities - such as provision of local affordable housing within Weymouth. Alongside this, the Council has acted quickly, flexibly and appropriately in addressing national issues, such as incorporating the legacy benefits from hosting the 2012 Olympics, and has worked with partners to agree a set of aims and priorities for this that will support the community and corporate aims. For example, it has a priority to become a centre for marine excellence and has begun to deliver this by helping support the new national sailing academy. Overall, the Council is clear about its priorities and uses them to drive everything that it does.
- 34** Strategies are in place to deliver the priorities which support a good framework for delivery. Plans relate to the ambitions for the area, there are links between service strategies and the medium term financial strategy, and SMART targets are in place for improvement. These plans and strategies help set the framework for customer focused achievements in the longer term. For example, the corporate plan has targets to address key issues such as developing 25 marine businesses by 2010, reduce rough sleeping by 60 per cent in 2008 and to enable 60 new social housing units each year. These strategies ensure that priorities can be delivered appropriately.
- 35** Action plans are robust, although some have yet to be agreed. Plans state responsibilities, resource requirements, target outcomes and contributions from staff and partners. Pathfinder projects have clear leadership, defined and agreed areas of work, supported by project management and clear timelines and outcomes. The Council has worked with others to determine clear outcome-based targets for each of the four priority areas. However, action plans for some aims within the community strategy, for example, economy and health, are not yet complete, although others such as housing are in place. Overall, plans focus action on priorities.
- 36** Priorities are well understood by partners and this enables effective joint action. As well as an agreed, shared community strategy with all major partners, specific priorities have been agreed with key players, such as housing and regeneration activities. Partners are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and resources are shared, such as through the Westwey partnership with shared premises and processes in order to deliver joint goals. These partnerships demonstrate effective sharing of learning, for example on improving benefits processes. Staff are clear and enthusiastic about working to achieve these priorities.

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

- 37** Robust action is taken to deliver the strategies. Priorities and resources are linked, with the Council demonstrating a track record of moving resources away from non-priorities. This has led to improved services in priority areas such as housing and customer care. This includes a focus on harder to reach groups such as an improved homelessness service, faster processing of benefits and new neighbourhood management groups targeting deprived areas. The Westhaven Housing development is a good example of where the Council has worked with others to provide high quality accommodation for disabled and older people. The corporate plan is clear that the Council is reducing the costs of services which do not contribute to these priority areas. This is evidenced by disinvestment in some enforcement posts, and by difficult decisions such as a major internal restructure to align service delivery to the four key priorities. Stakeholders are actively encouraged to contribute to action planning, with the Council integrating the community's views into ranking its priorities. This helps deliver services targeted towards users' needs.

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

Capacity

- 38 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Financial management is good and the Council works well with partners to deliver shared objectives. Human resources and scrutiny arrangements are adequate and developing, with a new staff structure being implemented to align the Council's services to its priorities. However, some councillors do not have sufficient experience in delivering strategic aims. Consideration of equality and diversity issues is fair. But delivery of equalities outcomes for the community has been delayed and a systematic approach to diversity, human rights and user focus has not yet been achieved.
- 39 Roles and responsibilities are clear and well understood. The corporate plan sets clear responsibilities for the three directors for each priority with the Chief Executive responsible for the fourth. The current management re-structure aims to further define roles and responsibilities, reduce overlap and duplication and redirect resources to front-line activities. Managerial leadership is well regarded by partners and staff and is developing further through the Council's new change and development programme. The Council's approach reflects self-awareness over capacity and provides solid arrangements to ensure strong managerial leadership.
- 40 Council decision making is timely and transparent and risk management is a strong theme. The Council operates a modern committee structure as a fourth option authority with a number of defined brief holders. It has a set of committees including a standards committee that allow the Council to make decisions at the appropriate level with councillors and officers working well together within the ethical framework with clarity over their respective roles and responsibilities. The risk register is reviewed quarterly by the audit committee and service managers are held to account for implementing recommendations and reporting on progress.

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

- 41 Some councillors are not sufficiently focussed on the strategic issues and challenges facing the Borough. While councillors have a good track record of effectively supporting their local communities, some do not have a good understanding of strategic issues. For example, not all councillors engage adequately within forums and partnerships in the region and sub region to ensure co-operation in tackling the strategic issues. In addition, some councillors do not fully appreciate the impact of their behaviour on the image of the Council. There are instances where democratic debate has turned into public political conflict in key policy areas such as car parking charges, regeneration of the pavilion-ferry terminal site and the future political structure of the Council. The manner in which such debates are undertaken can damage public and partners view of the Council. However, there is a sound approach to learning and development for councillors with personal development plans and a good range of training provided. But a lack of media skills may contribute to the mixed messages which undermine the Council's reputation and clarity in its strategy. Coupled with local political changes and a proposal for a new political structure, future arrangements need to preserve the capacity for continued good cross party working to support the delivery of the Council's aims.
- 42 Scrutiny arrangements are adequate. Reviews are not consistently rigorous and challenging. The scrutiny and performance committee is currently undertaking three inquires: on-street parking; governance and performance management arrangements of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership; and the public image of the Council. The committee is actively supported by a relevant director and the democratic services manager, with other officer support drafted in as required. However, councillors do not demonstrate strong skills or effective impact in this area. The Council acknowledges that there is a lack of support for the process and further investment and training is planned. Scrutiny is therefore not yet fully rigorous enough to contribute to service improvement.
- 43 The Council has sound arrangements for financial management and securing value for money. The overall Use of Resources score improved from two (out of four) in 2005/06 to three (out of four) in 2006/07 which has been maintained in 2007/08, although the overall cost of services remains high compared with others. The Council's finance base is restricted but managed well, with cross-party support to maintain a balanced budget. The Council has a robust financial strategy and has used this to deliver efficiency savings of £2.8 million and additional income of £3.1 million in the period 2004/05 to 2008/09. Finance for service improvements in 2008/09 is clearly identified, and though the Council faces further pressures in 2009/10, it has shown a consistent ability to deliver efficiency. Further external funding of £6.6 million has been secured to support local regeneration initiatives from the South West Regional Development Agency, with a bid to the Commission for Architecture in the Built Environment (CABE) for a further £4 million from the Sea Change programme awaiting decision. These robust financial arrangements provide a stable base for the delivery of the corporate plan.

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

- 44 The Council manages its staff adequately. It has some effective human resources (HR) policies and a new workforce development plan is in preparation. There is a good approach to management development as part of the change and development programme, including a focus on developing competencies for all management. Annual appraisals are consistently used. Sickness absence was higher than average in 2007/08, and the Council is addressing this through appropriate management training. The Council is responsive to issues raised in the staff survey, though it was completed by only 36 per cent of staff. Staff are positive and committed in their work, though clearly under pressure of workload. However, the current re-structure process is seen positively and the Council's approach and actions have the potential to develop stronger workforce capacity for the future.
- 45 The Council works effectively with partners to increase capacity and address shared objectives. The capacity of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has improved with new theme groups having been set up; this for example has helped deliver more affordable housing. Work supporting local friends' groups has led to improved services such as more attractive, well-used parks as well as helping build community cohesion. The South Dorset Building Control Partnership as progressed by the Council and other districts, is developing well. Partnership work through the Pathfinder project has resulted for example in building blocks such as a joint waste strategy. There is acceptance that some other areas require closer and more sustained relationships to be fully effective, for example the business community.
- 46 The Council has a good approach to procurement. Work with other councils as part of the Pathfinder project is positive and is enabling alternative service delivery models. For instance, the Westwey Revenues and Benefits service established with West Dorset District Council has provided cost savings and improved performance. The Council has invested in procurement staff and established a network in departments. It has achieved savings through the use of e-procurement and e-market place and has helped small and medium enterprises (SMEs), for example by targeting the biggest local suppliers. It has also engaged with SMEs on how to do business with the Council, such as through an accreditation system removing the need to undertake pre-qualification questionnaires. This approach is part of a strategic approach to procurement which considers issues beyond cost. Overall, the Council delivers effective procurement which gains efficiencies that contribute to local priorities.
- 47 Information and communication technology supports front line services and is improving access for residents. The Council has sufficient information and technology resources to deliver its priorities and staff are encouraged to be flexible in meeting service needs. The imminent closing of the cash office is a clear example where better use of ICT is enabling improved customer access, for example by more effective use of direct debit payments. The customer contact centre is actively managed with clear performance indicators and service standards, with ICT playing a major part in this improved service.

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

48 The Council's strategic management of diversity and user focus is weak. It has an agreed equality strategy and provides a range of diversity and equality training to councillors and staff. Though the Council has reached level two of the Local Government Equality Standard, work to achieve level three has been delayed because of resource pressures. Staff are not fully reflective of the population, with a below average representation of staff from black and minority ethnic communities or those with a disability. In addition, some councillors do not understand the range of issues involved in order to make further progress. The delivery of outcomes has been slow. The customer contact centre is a positive example, and the programme of equality impact assessments (EIAs) of services has begun well with completed assessments of the revenues and benefits service and parking services. However, some EIAs, such as the housing advice service, have been delayed. Additional funding of £20,000 has been secured to help support delivery of the Council's strategy focussed on supporting services in delivering equality impact assessments. The absence of a comprehensive approach to diversity and user focus is limiting the Council's ability to meet the needs of all its citizens.

Performance management

- 49 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Performance management is not yet systematic across the Council, although good progress has been made over recent years in developing a new framework. The framework aligns the community plan to the council plan through departmental and individual work plans, but it is not fully operational. Performance management of partnerships is inconsistent, with gaps in information, although the new framework is also used by partner councils and therefore supports the proposed approach to partnership monitoring. Councillor involvement with performance management is variable, and data analysis, particularly of some community groups, is weak. However, the Council has worked well to improve its customer services, and has good processes in place for managing complaints and comments, making improvements to services as a result.
- 50 A developing culture of constructive challenge among staff and councillors is delivering improvement in key areas. Focused performance management and escalation processes linked to the corporate priorities has delivered positive results. For instance, in planning, the Council chose to invest in staff, systems and processes leading to improved processing times; action in housing enabled the Council to meet targets for homelessness and affordable housing. Rigorous management of customer services, along with the delivery of a new customer contact centre and a clear customer charter with specific standards, has for example enabled 85 per cent of enquiries to be dealt with at first point of contact.

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

- 51 Monitoring and review of performance enables the Council to stay on track. Information about performance is regularly produced which captures key areas of the Council's work. This is used to solve performance issues and is reported in a transparent and coherent manner. An example of this is the Westwey project where there was recognised poor performance which has since improved. The effective use of information ensures that the Council is able to monitor its progress against targets and identify those areas which require intervention. Overall, the current framework is increasingly helping both staff and councillors to check the progress made in achieving objectives.
- 52 Performance management in partnerships is developing. Action plans to support the community plan are expected to be in place from December 2008 onwards. Housing is the most developed area with a SMART plan (first reported in June 2008), although other areas, for example, the economy theme, require further work. The LSP will use the QPR software system used by the wider DSP and the Council and is now moving towards a Dorset-wide management system. Other partnerships, such as the Westwey partnership and housing company have appropriate management systems in place which results in improving performance for both these areas. This approach is strengthening the effectiveness of partnership arrangements in meeting the priorities of the community.
- 53 Councillor involvement in performance management is inconsistent. The three committees that are key to this work are audit, scrutiny and policy. There is inconsistent application of performance management in each group. For example, a few brief holders have only a basic understanding of performance management processes and key performance information, and as a result, constructive challenge can be lacking.
- 54 Performance reporting is adequate. Quarterly updates go to scrutiny committee with exceptions reported to management committee if there is a need for resources to support any corrective actions. However, some updates to management committee are delivered verbally. The chair has appropriate input into performance management although the quality of data is questionable. The new performance management system will provide a more standardised reporting model. Weaknesses in addressing and adequately scrutinising its own performance lessens the ability of the Council to improve service for the people of Weymouth and Portland.
- 55 Data collection and analysis including reference to the needs of black and minority ethnic groups and other groups of disadvantage, and geographic areas is weak. The current vacancy for a communities' manager is on hold and there is acknowledgement that current data capture is inadequate. Although the County Council provides some data, for example, on ethnic groups, other harder to reach groups such as economically and educationally disadvantaged groups or older people are not collated or shared properly. Work with other partners such as the fire service and pathfinder projects is expected to help through data sharing. The absence of a comprehensive data set weakens the ability of the Council to improve services for the community.

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

- 56 The Council manages complaints, grievances and representations about service performance well and uses the information to improve. The customer charter is clear and enables service users and staff to submit complaints about service performance. There are clearly stated aims and expectations with defined service standards. Complaints to the Council are logged effectively and directed to the responsible officer. There is a clear escalation process for issues relating to the Council and a process for supporting complainants whose issues are beyond the Council's control. Complaints are linked with a lessons learned process and used to inform service development, which for example, has improved the bus pass system and increased benefits training. This ensures that service users can expect a supportive response to complaints or grievances.
- 57 Targets set in business plans are realistic though challenging and aligned with corporate priorities. Previous target setting has been broadly historical using an incremental approach with the absence of a rigorous framework for assessing suitable targets in priority areas. However, the business planning process now makes good use of benchmarking where possible and wider engagement with others provides external input to target setting. The Council's target-setting process is becoming more visible with a system which fairly reflects differences of emphasis (for example, gold silver and bronze targets) and links to the management of resources. For example, a risk-based approach has led to changes in the frequency of environmental health inspections to premises, with good-performing outlets now having fewer visits. The Council's approach ensures a focus on improvement in priority areas.

What has been achieved?

- 58** The Council is performing well in this area. It is achieving high quality in its priority areas, as well as some other services. It has targeted four main themes to improve, and has successfully transformed services in these areas, helping to revitalise the borough and improve the community's quality of life, both in the shorter and longer term. This is a significant achievement.
- 59** The rate and extent of improvement in priority areas has been good recently. Sixty one per cent of performance indicators (PIs) improved over the last year which is above the national average for district councils, and there is an above average number of PIs in the best 25 per cent, such as planning applications and appeals, waste collected, amount of private sector homes vacant and cleanliness indicators. Unaudited information shows further improvements in many areas, in particular benefits and waste, and recent equalities work has started to have a positive effect. However, only 55 per cent of PIs have improved over the last three years, which is slightly below average, and until the last few years the Council did not have a good track record of improvement. Corporate health PIs, such as sickness rates have deteriorated in 2007/08. Overall, this level of performance now compares well with others, and the quality of service is what could realistically be expected given the context in which the Council operates.
- 60** Crime rates in most areas except robberies have reduced, and fear of crime has improved slightly. The crime and disorder reduction partnership works effectively, for example by targeting anti-social behaviour and initiatives in deprived areas, such as providing new major play areas and a youth bus that provides advice to over 60 youths a week. Work in one vandalised area led to the installation of a park which is now used by around 50 people a day and the perception is that vandalism has dropped by 20 per cent.
- 61** Benefits performance for 2008/09 is now good and improving. Performance has historically been below average and worsened further in 2007/08 at the start of the Westwey partnership. As the partnership has settled however, performance has improved. For example, unaudited results for 2008/09 show collecting business rates and overpayments as now much improved, and processing claims and changes are completed in a satisfactory 12 days. A recent in-house survey suggested 80 per cent of customers were now happy with the service.

What has been achieved?

- 62 The Council is putting in place effective building blocks to enable future improvements. It has invested in better partnership working to address underperformance in priority areas, such as the Westwey partnership to improve benefits performance. It has committed in its capital programme to spend £3.3 million on affordable housing over seven years and £30,000 on leisure paths. It is successful at bidding for funds, such as a recent £6 million grant from SWRDA to regenerate the seafront with modern high quality public spaces, lighting, cafes, attractions and visitor facilities. It has also implemented a grant funded programme of Magnet play areas for disadvantaged groups. It is supporting the County Council with plans and communication on improving transport accessibility such as the new relief road, as well as working with them and other districts on a joint waste strategy as part of the pathfinder project, although this has yet to lead to outcomes. These improvements contribute well to partners' and County Council targets for improving the whole area.
- 63 Work to enhance the quality of life for vulnerable groups is improving. For example, new major play areas in deprived areas, improved housing supply, and community engagement work are helping to build cohesion within some areas. Work with disabled people has led to improved accessibility and clearer signs for car parking services and council offices. Easton Gardens friends' group has been allocated a £42,000 grant to enable it to carry out improvements such as installing a wheelchair space next to a bench, and play equipment suitable for disabled children. Many initiatives and events take place that are targeted at harder to reach groups, such as island clean-ups in deprived areas, clearer leaflets for those needing legal aid, a 'sloppy slippers' campaign for older people, and a summer squad to engage younger people. The Council's new restructure intends to build further on this. However, a lack of baseline information or cohesive plans to these initiatives means a lack of a co-ordinated or extensive approach for certain groups such as older people - who make up a significant part of the population - or those in more deprived areas. There is little evidence of work done with black and minority ethnic groups, and smaller community groups often express dissatisfaction with the Council's work in this area. Overall, the Council has yet to develop a strategic approach to some community groups or areas, and outcomes cannot be fully demonstrated.
- 64 The remainder of the section considers the Council's performance in its priority areas.

Promoting improvement in the local economy

- 65 The Council has a good track record in delivering outcomes for the economic benefit of the borough. It recognises that this is the area's highest priority, and has proactively focussed on this over many years, and has put building blocks in place to secure the long term future of the borough. Although several objectives are over the longer term and have not yet been achieved – for example, increasing employment by 4 per cent and improving deprivation ranking from 125 to second quartile by 2012 - the Council has so far achieved within the aims set out in its corporate plan:
- assisted 7 marine businesses to set up at Osprey Quay (against a target of 25 by 2012);
 - supported the set up of 17 creative industries in the local area;

- assisted the local fishing sector in securing grant funding to improve facilities, resulting in increased wage levels for 17 fishermen;
 - increased take-up in business link services from 371 in 2006 to 693 in 2008 – an increase of 58 per cent above target; and
 - increased visitor satisfaction according to a tourism survey from 63 per cent in 2005 to 75 per cent in 2008.
- 66** The Council has improved the town and marine business environment. It has a good track record in attracting inward investment and has helped set up the national sailing academy and construction of a 600-berth marina. The development of Osprey Quay and Portland Port are good examples of where the Council has worked to ensure new business and jobs to replace those lost in defence industries recently. Town centre and esplanade plans have started to be realised through the Townscape Heritage Initiative, with 32 repair grants having smartened up shop and hotel fronts, along with repainting of street furniture and public art such as the King George statue and refurbished beach shelters. Improved management of the harbour has transformed the area into a vibrant and attractive place. This has all led to an extremely clean and attractive seafront which has helped improve the tourism, visitor satisfaction and image of the area.
- 67** Preparation and investments to secure economic benefits to the area from the 2012 Olympics are positive. For example, the Council has helped run and promote successful events in the borough such as locally based beach events and the Spirit of the Sea festival. For this, an estimated 35,000 visitors attended and generated an estimated £1.43 million for the local economy. In September, the Council supported the launch of the Olympiad (a four-year celebration of the arts leading up to 2012) with a partnership festival programme including pyrotechnics, acrobatics, drumming, and contemporary dance, which attracted over 10,000 people. However, the pavilion area redevelopment plans are not fully in place leading to uncertainty within the community on this issue.

What has been achieved?

Meeting the housing needs of the borough

- 68** The Council has improved performance in its priority of 'meeting the housing needs of the borough', and is delivering a highly effective service in this area. Recent achievements include completing 94 affordable houses in 2007/08 which met LAA targets, introducing a choice based letting scheme ahead of schedule, reducing rough sleepers by 60 per cent, and reducing the number of families housed in bed and breakfast from 50 in 2005/06 to 6 in 2007/08. It has achieved this by working with private landlords to lease fit-for-purpose properties to families in temporary accommodation. As at September 2008, 48 households were in temporary accommodation, against a target of 85. It has developed a deposit scheme which has helped 918 people with a shortage of funds find accommodation with private landlords. This has helped reduce homeless applications from 462 in 2002/03 to 44 in 2007/08. Work with a major housing partner, the Primary Care Trust and the County Council has led to the Westhaven Housing development, a high quality scheme providing accommodation for older and disabled people. The housing partner, on which the Council has board membership, is providing an effective service for its tenants, with an 84 per cent satisfaction rate and 98 per cent of its homes meeting the decent homes standard. It has a new 2008 housing strategy in place and a housing needs assessment was carried out in 2007. This ensures that the Council is meeting the needs of the more vulnerable members of the community.

Protect and improve the natural and built environment

- 69** The Council performs well in its priority to 'protect and improve the natural and built environment', with impressive achievements in waste and recycling. Major recent outcomes for the environment include: increasing recycling to an excellent 43 per cent; reducing waste collected to a very low 298kg per head; and installing three major new play areas which have helped lower crime and provide better facilities for younger people. In partnership with other agencies the Council funds the Portland Coast and Countryside Project, for example, by employing a ranger to increase awareness and accessibility of the Portland environment. The Council has improved street-cleaning to above average. For example, with CDRP funding it has cleaned 70 areas with a 'wipe out graffiti' scheme. Alongside this project, the Council has arranged for a young local artist to repaint the town's underpasses with artwork based on local themes.
- 70** The Council was one of the first councils to invest in an environmentally friendly bio diesel vehicle fleet. Some initiatives have been completed ahead of target, such as collecting organic recycling waste from flats and removing oil tanks at Osprey Quay in order to encourage redevelopment. In all, 80 per cent of performance indicators in this area have improved and most targets have been met, demonstrating the Council's commitment to the environment.

71 The Council effectively balances improving the built environment alongside protecting the natural environment. For example, it has enhanced a site of special scientific interest at a waste transfer station, improving the surrounding wasteland into a haven for wildlife with increased numbers of species. It has used funding to improve local trails such as the Rodwell trail making the borough more accessible to walkers and cyclists, and harnessed voluntary groups to improve the area's parks. This has led to extra facilities such as interpretation boards, better play equipment and the receipt of two green flag awards. Developments at Osprey Quay have been facilitated in an area of high nature conservation importance, with strict use of environmental assessments to ensure environmental issues are properly addressed and subject to conditions and/or legal agreements. Performance against planning indicators is excellent, with all categories of applications being processed on target and the amount of appeals won is in line with the top performing councils nationally.

A well-managed council

- 72** The Council has greatly improved services in line with its key priority of being a well managed council. A fully accessible customer contact centre provides a highly effective one-stop-shop first point of contact to access customer services. Customer care improvements have led to a refurbished reception, new complaints systems and customer charter, and a user-friendly website rated as 'transactional' by SOCITM. Complaints and feedback are well managed, leading to improved service delivery and shared learning across departments. In-house monitoring has concluded 90 per cent of customers are now satisfied with the service they receive, and 85 per cent of calls are met at first point of contact. Value for money and efficiency savings targets have been met, although the Council's costs remain relatively high compared with others.
- 73** Public satisfaction with the Council is improving though from a low base. For example, 2006/07 showed satisfaction was in the worst 25 per cent of councils nationally for satisfaction with planning, cleanliness, waste and with the overall Council it had risen from 38 per cent to 42 per cent – although the average is 53 per cent. A poor media and customer image is an ongoing concern. Within some individual services however, customers express higher levels of satisfaction; for example satisfaction with cleanliness has risen from 52 to 60 per cent, recycling from 74 to 85 per cent, and sport from 46 to 58 per cent. Overall, despite delivering good services, the Council has yet to see the results that this investment will have on improving customer satisfaction and their perception of the Council.

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 Weymouth and Portland Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place during October 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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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

www.audit-commission.gov.uk
