

Corporate Assessment Report

June 2006



# Corporate Assessment

Coventry City Council

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

### **Copies of this report**

If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call 0845 056 0566.

© Audit Commission 2006

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](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Areas for improvement</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Summary of assessment scores</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>10</b>
The locality	10
The Council	11
<b>What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?</b>	<b>12</b>
Ambition	12
Prioritisation	14
<b>What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?</b>	<b>17</b>
Capacity	17
Performance management	19
<b>What has been achieved?</b>	<b>23</b>
Sustainable communities and transport	24
Safer and stronger communities	26
Healthier communities	28
Older people	29
Children and young people	30
<b>Appendix 1 - Framework for corporate assessment</b>	<b>32</b>

## 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 all services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes. The separate JAR report 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.

## Executive summary

- 5 The Council is improving significantly and has put in place many of the essential building blocks to enable sustained improvement.
- 6 Strong and committed leadership has focussed on improving priority services and contributing to quality of life improvements for residents and visitors. The overarching ambition is to provide overall improvement including narrowing the inequalities gap across the city. This is underpinned by linked ambitions in specific areas. For example, the Council has been successful in attracting investment and in regenerating areas of the city. It is also working effectively to improve educational achievement so that local people are equipped to fill the jobs that are created. Its housing strategy is aligned with these objectives. In addition to increasing affordable housing and standards, aims include increasing the provision of more aspirational housing so that those in better paid jobs are attracted to living in the city and therefore contribute to improving the economy.
- 7 Priorities are informed by a good understanding of user and community need and communities are able to influence service provision. The Council engages with hard to reach and potentially disadvantaged groups. For example, communities in one priority neighbourhood have shaped the provision of a one stop shop which brings together a number of agencies to respond to local need. This model is being further developed in other priority areas. Services are targeted at the most vulnerable. For example, where appropriate, health services are targeted towards Asian women through places of religious worship and services have been developed to meet the particular needs of asylum seekers.
- 8 The Council recognises and celebrates the diversity of its population. Council leaders demonstrate community leadership through involvement in a range of initiatives and projects and are personally involved in engaging minority communities and groups such as gay and lesbian residents. Robust processes help ensure equality and the Council has achieved level three of the Equalities Standard.
- 9 The Council has contributed to improvement in areas that matter to residents and visitors. Both employment and life expectancy are increasing at a higher rate than the national average. The Council has shown strong leadership in working with partners to reduce crime and tackle anti-social behaviour and the causes of crime. As a result crime has significantly reduced and residents feel safer. New jobs have been attracted to the more deprived areas of the city and many of these are filled by local people. Effective performance management has improved key services. Two years ago social care was a weak 'no-star' service and it has now significantly improved to achieve a 'two-star' assessment. Investment has been targeted at areas of weaker performance such as some environmental services and benefits and these are now getting better. The range of services provided, and outcomes for young people are improving. Most children and young people are healthy. Educational attainment is improving and the majority of schools perform well.

- 10 Importantly the Council has put in place key foundations to enable the delivery of future improvement. Relationships within the Council are generally strong with officers and councillors having a good understanding of their respective roles. There are inevitable political differences but mature relationships help to ensure that the Council is not distracted from the delivery of priorities. Decision-making is open and transparent and scrutiny is having an impact in some areas. At a senior level the Council takes a corporate approach to decision-making and service development although this is less evident at lower levels in the organisation. Partnership working is particularly strong and built on mutual trust and respect. This enables collaborative working and the sharing of resources towards the delivery of joint objectives.
- 11 The Council is aware that capacity is an issue, and that, in some areas, staff morale was affected by the implementation of single status. Capacity is being developed through improved training and development opportunities and stronger human resource management, although this has not been effective in achieving sickness reduction targets. The Council currently has a medium term funding gap which must be addressed by 2007/08. Although the approach to achieving this is clear and the Council has made cost reductions in the past it does not have service specific targets to help ensure delivery.
- 12 The Council has not taken a strategic approach to value for money with high service costs in some areas. Ambitions for the area are not knitted together to provide a long term vision for the city in order to enhance opportunities for collaborative working and optimise the use of capacity. It is positive that action is already being taken to address both these issues.

## Areas for improvement

- 13 The Council has been successful in achieving considerable improvement over the last three years. The Council and its partners have clear ambitions and priorities in service areas and themes which have provided a framework for improvement. The Council can now look to the coherent long term development of the city. This means developing a long term vision that is more specific about what the Council, residents and partners want Coventry to be in fifteen or twenty years. The development of a clear and jointly owned vision will provide a framework for longer term planning and decision-making with partners and stakeholders.
- 14 The Council has recognised a medium term funding gap and is aware that service costs are relatively high in some areas. The Council and partners have set challenging targets for improvement and these will place demands on resources. This heightens the importance of improving value for money and taking a strategic approach. This will require the assessment of opportunities for cost reduction alongside assessment of the impact of outcomes for service users and the wider population.
- 15 Over the last three years the Council has appropriately focussed on improving priority services, notably social care for vulnerable residents. It has now reached the stage where corporate systems and processes can be further developed and refined to strengthen the platform for future improvement. For example, risk management and related issues such as business continuity planning are developing but not embedded across the organisation. The linkage between finance and policy requires further refinement to provide a basis for better informed decision-making and also to contribute to the delivery of improved value for money.
- 16 The Council is aware that capacity is an issue. High levels of sickness absence are a drain on resources. Although there are signs of improvement, levels remain high and further action is needed to ensure that managers are equipped to manage sickness absence effectively.

## Summary of assessment scores

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

### \*\*Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

Scores on 5 themes	Overall corporate assessment score
Two or more themes with a score of 4 None less than score of 3	4
Three or more themes with a score of 3 or more None less than score of 2	3
Three or more themes with a score of 2 or more	2
Any other combination	1

## Context

### The locality

- 17 Coventry City Council is one of the seven metropolitan authorities in the West Midlands conurbation. It is the second largest city in the West Midlands.
- 18 The mid-year population estimate for 2004 from the Office for National Statistics is 304,200, 21.7 per cent being from minority ethnic communities. Coventry's population is younger than average, with 24 per cent of people under 18 years of age and 35 per cent under 24. The high proportion of 18 to 24 year olds reflects the fact that two successful universities - Coventry University and University of Warwick - are located in the city. People over the age of 65 make up 16 per cent of residents, a little below the national average. The over 85 population is expected to grow by 17 per cent by 2010.
- 19 The city is home to an estimated 6,500 refugees and 1,500 asylum seekers. Economic migrants have recently been welcomed from Poland, the Baltic States and Malta. Since April 2004, 1,319 people in Coventry from 73 countries have been granted British citizenship.
- 20 The Council is the largest employer in the city with approximately 16,000 staff, half of whom are part time. The 2001 Census showed that 32,000 residents work outside Coventry and 48,000 people commute into the city to work. The number of Coventry residents in work rose from 132,000 in February 2004 to 137,000 in May 2005. The number of people of working age (16 to 65) claiming benefits in Coventry fell from 29,700 in August 2004 to 28,800 in May 2005. Black and minority ethnic people make up around 10 per cent of the council workforce and 5 per cent of the top earners. People with disabilities account for about 5 per cent of the council workforce and 6 per cent of the top earners.
- 21 Average household income in Coventry has increased over the last year from 86.4 per cent of the national figure to 89.3 per cent. There is a significant contrast in the distribution of incomes across the city with the poorest 10 per cent of households receiving under £7,121 per annum compared to the richest 10 per cent earning over £52,808.
- 22 The index of deprivation shows improvement from the fiftieth most deprived in 2000 to the sixty-fourth, using the new methodology introduced in 2004. Thirty-three per cent of the population in Coventry live in areas that are currently designated as being in the 20 per cent most deprived areas in England.

## The Council

- 23 At the time of this assessment, the Council was run by a Conservative administration holding 27 seats, Labour holding 20, Liberal Democrats 3, Socialists 2 and Independents 2. All 54 councillors make major decisions about policies and services at a full council meeting held in the council chamber every six weeks.
- 24 The Council operates with the leader and cabinet model. There are nine cabinet members with specific portfolio responsibilities. The cabinet meets every two weeks while cabinet members hold individual meetings throughout the year - all are held in public. There is an overarching scrutiny co-ordination committee plus four scrutiny boards.
- 25 The Council Leader is responsible for policy and governance. The portfolio includes: the community plan, corporate plan and comprehensive performance assessment; the Coventry Partnership (Local Strategic Partnership), public relations and liaising with management board; and chairing regular meetings of the cabinet.
- 26 The Chief Executive leads a management board made up of six directors, three heads of service and the Communication and Media Relations Manager. The board is supported by the corporate management team of the Council's 70 most senior managers. This meets quarterly to discuss and agree managerial priorities and to ensure coherent and consistent leadership across the Council. A new Neighbourhood Management structure has been adopted and is being rolled out.
- 27 There are about 128,000 dwellings in the city, of which approximately 19 per cent are rented through Registered Social Landlords (RSL). The council transferred its own housing stock to an RSL in a large scale voluntary transfer in 2000.
- 28 The net revenue budget for 2005/06 was £382 million, an increase of 5.4 per cent on the previous year. Average Band D council tax is £1,258 which is close to the average of £1,205 for unitary councils. The overall capital budget was £124 million.

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

### Ambition

- 29 The Council is performing well in this area. It has a good understanding of the needs of its communities and has set challenging ambitions to reduce deprivation within Coventry. These ambitions are well understood by staff and councillors and shared by partners who work effectively with the Council's focussed leadership towards their delivery.
- 30 The ambitions for the area are effectively communicated and well understood. The Council has remained focussed on long standing ambitions to reduce deprivation and increase economic well being. By working with the strong Coventry Partnership it has refined the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and developed an outcome framework with measures and targets. Targets are stretching – for example, to reduce mortality from coronary heart and related diseases, from 162.3 per 100,000 population in 1996/98 to 97.4 by 2010 and to reduce the number of offences committed in the City by over ten per cent between 2004/05 and 2005/06. The LAA has been incorporated into the recently revised Coventry Community Plan. This strengthens the partnership's focus on a shared set of stretching targets.
- 31 Ambitions are clear for different sectors of the community and are reviewed in response to changing circumstances. The Coventry Community Plan identifies 31 priority disadvantaged neighbourhoods and 12 communities of interest including disaffected young people, looked after children, teenage parents and their children and women and children experiencing domestic violence. The recent update has adopted the five Every Child Matters themes for all citizens.
- 32 The political leadership has set challenging targets to improve people's lives. The overarching ambition is to improve services and the quality of life for all while closing the inequalities gap within the city. To achieve this, the Council is focussed on improving the quality of life in the most deprived areas of the city; reducing health inequalities; improving education and attracting investment. Challenging targets include significant population growth and increasing the percentage of the student population that remains in Coventry after graduation. Although the Council does not have a specific regeneration strategy or detailed vision for what the city could become in the longer term, work on this is progressing.
- 33 Council objectives reflect the central/local government shared priorities. They complement the overarching aim of the Coventry Community Plan to 'bring together resources, energy and creativity of key organisations, groups, communities and people to work to meet the economic, social and environmental needs of the City of Coventry and the health and well-being of its people'.

The Community Plan was recently revised to reflect the refreshed Local Area Agreement (LAA). The linkage between community and Council ambitions helps to clarify objectives and enables focus on their delivery.

- 34** Council objectives are clear and well understood. In 2005 the Council developed a new statement of vision, values and corporate objectives. These reflect the social, economic and environmental issues facing the city. The Council's vision is 'to make Coventry a growing accessible city where people choose to live, work and be educated and where businesses choose to invest.' The following corporate objectives help ensure focus towards this vision:
- to improve the quality and efficiency of services and make it easier to access them;
  - to ensure the best quality education for all and that children and young people can achieve their maximum potential;
  - to regenerate the city and ensure people have a good choice of jobs and housing;
  - to promote health, independence and choice for all citizens;
  - to create a city where people feel safe and confident and no-one is disadvantaged by the neighbourhood in which they live;
  - to make the city clean and green; and
  - to actively promote equality so that people from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities.
- 35** Ambitions are underpinned by targets and action plans. For example in support of the objective to improve access to services the customer contact centre (Coventry Direct) aims to deliver all services around the citizen/customer by 2008. There is a programme for restructuring contact with the Council through Coventry Direct and one stop shops. For example, developments include introducing text messaging to encourage young people to access services. Educational attainment targets focus on reducing the gap between those living in priority neighbourhoods and the rest of the City. This supports the objectives of promoting equality and ensuring that all young people can achieve their potential.
- 36** Intelligence, data and community engagement are used effectively to shape ambitions. Community profiles have been developed for neighbourhoods across the city. Key indicators, for example, of life expectancy, household income and crime, have enabled the Council to identify priority neighbourhoods such as Stoke Aldermoor and Willenhall. This coupled with community engagement has influenced community and Council ambitions.
- 37** The Council is effectively engaging with service users and groups at risk of disadvantage to influence objectives and change service delivery. In social care initiatives have been expanded to consult and involve customers and carers. The Adult Education service holds an annual conference with adults with learning difficulties. The Cabinet Member (Finance & Equalities) holds regular meetings with the Older People's Advisory Panel and Disabled People's Advisory Panel.

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

There are effective arrangements to gather the views of children and young people and use them to make improvements. The Council has plans to improve further its intelligence gathering and develop strategic consultation processes with partners.

- 38 Senior officers and councillors are active in influencing regional issues. The Chief Executive is the lead for transport in the region and the Leader has recently been appointed to the board of the regional regeneration agency, Advantage West Midlands. Directors are involved in national and regional policy development. This means the Council is well placed to represent the interests of the city and balance its ambitions with regional initiatives.
- 39 Strong and effective managerial and political leadership enables the delivery of ambitions. The Chief Executive and Management Board are visible and energetic in effectively communicating ambitions and decisions both internally and externally. Leadership is provided within the Council and commitment to priorities is shown by engagement and participation in partnerships. The Council plays a substantial but not domineering role in the Coventry Partnership.
- 40 The Council takes difficult decisions to achieve its objectives. Recent examples include action to implement single status and the closure of five residential care homes to redirect resources in support of enabling independent living. This means that effective action is being taken to deliver longer term ambitions for the area.

## Prioritisation

- 41 The Council is performing well in this area. A range of approaches is used to identify priorities for all sectors of the community. It reviews the effectiveness of needs identification and takes action where necessary. Consequently priorities reflect need and are owned throughout the organisation and by partners who work effectively on joint strategies to help ensure their delivery. Additional resources are allocated to areas of high priority. The Council has recognised a medium term funding gap and is taking action to address this.
- 42 The priority themes for Coventry are clearly set out in the Community Plan:
  - jobs and the local economy;
  - health and well-being;
  - environment;
  - community safety;
  - equalities and communities;
  - learning and training;
  - housing; and
  - transport.

- 43 The Council's priorities reflect these themes. There is a shared emphasis on regeneration, education, training, community safety, the environment, health and housing. A commitment to equality and the overarching ambition to reduce deprivation are common to all the priorities. There is close working on the delivery of priorities through the local strategic partnership. Each theme is supported by a detailed two year action plan which includes respective responsibilities and milestones. This helps to ensure that the Council and its key partners are working together on delivering joint priorities for the areas.
- 44 Effective processes are in place to identify priorities. The Council uses a range of approaches to identify the needs of different sectors of the community and this informs strategies and actions. Intelligence and data are used to identify patterns of deprivation across the city and shape service provision. For example, Stoke Aldermoor was identified as a priority area and the one stop shop was developed through community consultation and engagement. Equalities impact assessments are completed for all services through a three-year rolling programme. Actions are incorporated into operational plans and have, for example, resulted in additional summer play schemes for children with special needs and improved physical access for disabled learners. The Beacon Status award for effective environmental health recognised the successful outcomes from the priority given to promoting health amongst minority ethnic communities. The Council adjusts services in accordance with the priorities of minority and disadvantaged groups.
- 45 Priorities are informed by consideration of both national and local issues. For example, the Council has given clear priority to assist elderly people in living at home rather than being taken into care. Action has been taken to achieve this and local need has been recognised by improved extra care provision at home.
- 46 The Council prioritises equalities corporately and within services. Level three of the Equality Standard was achieved in March 2005. A new sexual orientation equality policy and action plan was approved in 2005 and a Community Cohesion Strategy and Hate Crime Reduction Strategy are in preparation. Equality is prioritised within services. For example, adult education has effective strategies to widen participation and tackle social inclusion with a clear focus on recruiting learners who are usually hard to reach. Learning programmes are designed to meet the needs of different groups such as those with mental health problems and asylum seekers. Adult social care has clear and fair access criteria aimed at focusing resources on those in greatest need.
- 47 Strategies are linked to priorities and influence service provision with partners. For example, the youth service delivers a broad range of services. These are provided through multi-agency partnerships with joint assessments between Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service workers and the Youth Offending Service.
- 48 Investment is directed into priority areas. Over the last three years around £31 million of revenue expenditure has been redirected towards priorities including children and city services. Of this, £6 million has come from support services with other significant contributions from efficiencies in adult services. Additional funding has been allocated to environmental services in order to improve the appearance of the city.

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

- 49** The Council has a medium term financial strategy which links resources to service strategies. However, specific targets have not been set for bridging the predicted gap between resources and planned spending. Although a number of areas have been identified for potential savings no service targets have yet been set. This presents a risk to the delivery of priorities.
- 50** Neighbourhoods are effectively involved in prioritisation and action planning. In October 2005 three neighbourhood management areas were established. The police and fire service have realigned their boundaries to help enable joined up services and a local focus. This approach enables better involvement and engagement with communities and fortnightly mapping of crime, anti-social behaviour and environmental issues enable the targeting of resources to need. Although local area forums have not consistently engaged communities this is recognised and plans have been developed to move to a ward level system. This aims to increase engagement by consulting more locally to enable the Council and partners to be responsive to local issues.
- 51** Focus has been maintained on priorities. Priorities are owned at all levels within the organisation. Each portfolio holder is responsible for a rolling three-year strategic plan which is adjusted in accordance with changing circumstances. Portfolio priorities are integrated within service plans and performance targets. Senior officers' performance objectives relate to the corporate plan and staff are clear about the priorities and the relationship to their own objectives. Emerging issues, such as implementing single status, restructuring some service areas and progressing the delivery of the Ricoh Arena development have not distracted focus from priorities. Difficult issues have been addressed openly such as the decision to decline to provide financial support for an older people's centre project, as it was not considered to represent good value for money, and changing provision for people with learning difficulties.

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

### Capacity

- 52 The Council has adequate capacity to achieve its ambitions and priorities. There are clear challenges for it to address, such as ensuring value for money and effective human resource management, but there is a strong political and management focus on improving services. A strong senior management team is in place providing clear leadership and corporate focus across the Council.
- 53 There is not yet a robust approach to ensuring value for money. Although there are examples of cost reductions in some areas there has not been a consistent or strategic approach. Operational plans do not focus on value for money and this is not adequately addressed at the decision-making stage. A team is being established to review high spending and lower performing areas. This is particularly important to meet the corporate objective of improving the efficiency of services and to address a medium term funding gap.
- 54 The Council does not have specific plans to address the medium term financial gap. A budget deficit of over £6 million in 2007/08 and £5 million in 2008/09 remains after the planned use of £4 million reserves in 2007/08 and £2 million in 2008/09. There is a track record of achieving cost reductions in similar circumstances. Restructuring of street services generated £460,000 efficiency savings during 2003/04 with ongoing savings of £600,000 per year. Government efficiency savings targets were achieved in 2005/06 but future saving requirements represent a challenge to the organisation and a risk to the delivery of priorities.
- 55 Significant human resource issues have had a detrimental impact on capacity. Although the leadership of the organisation was strong in implementing single status this has inevitably impacted on industrial relations and affected staff morale. There are recruitment difficulties in some areas and sickness absence remains high. In 2004/05, 13.32 days were lost per full time equivalent employee, compared to a national council average of just under ten days. Early indications are that although staff absences are reducing in the current year, targets will not be achieved. Only 82 per cent of staff were appraised in 2005/06 against a target of 100 per cent. However, the Council is building staff capacity. The workforce development plan is underpinned by a framework for career pathways to facilitate staff progression not only within professional areas but also across services. Staff are engaged in developing services. Without fully effective human resource management the Council is at risk of being unable to achieve corporate objectives.

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

- 56** Risk management is developing but is not embedded throughout the Council. Risk management is particularly focussed in the planning and management of large projects through the Special Projects Finance Team. Users are engaged in the identification of risks. Corporate and directorate risk registers are in place and reported appropriately. Recently some of the service risk registers, which underpin directorate registers, have been strengthened although not all service areas have robust risk management practices. Risk awareness training is now being delivered to officers and councillors.
- 57** Councillor capacity is generally strong. Councillors are well supported and trained, with personal development plans and six-monthly appraisals. Training is mandatory for councillors on specialist committees, and some training is in place to improve the quality of challenge arising through scrutiny. All cabinet members have mentors from other councils. Opposition councillors have good access to training opportunities and also have their own mentoring scheme. This contributes to the corporate objective of demonstrating good leadership.
- 58** Effective relationships exist between the administration and the main opposition group and between councillors and officers. Councillors appropriately focus on policy development and officers ensure implementation. The Chief Executive regularly meets with the administration and other political groups, and briefings are provided to shadow cabinet members by directors and other senior employees. Councillors generally respect the senior officer leadership which they believe has led to considerable improvement over the last four years. Regular meetings between senior managers and portfolio holders are seen as challenging but supportive and productive.
- 59** Decision-making is clear and transparent. Both the fortnightly public cabinet meetings and cabinet portfolio holder meetings provide an opportunity for opposition and scrutiny committee members to challenge constructively. This professional and open approach permits contentious issues to be appropriately discussed and enables clear public insight into the way in which the Council carries out its responsibilities.
- 60** The scrutiny function is developing well and making an impact in some areas. A scrutiny co-ordination committee agrees the overall work programme of four scrutiny boards. Each board has its own strategic plan. Scrutiny contributed to the smoke free Coventry campaign. However, some scrutiny councillors are still developing their skills and understanding. The Council acknowledges the need for further development.
- 61** Appropriate mechanisms are in place and effective to ensure high ethical standards. A standards committee, chaired by a retired judge, meets every two months. Procedures are in place for local hearings and investigations. Codes of conduct and protocols are in place. Issues addressed by the standards committee include those on the declaration of membership of private organisations. The Council is currently looking to build on this through succession planning of the standards committee.

- 62 The approach to procurement is realising efficiency savings. A comprehensive strategy, in line with the National Procurement Strategy, is in place and is supported with a toolkit and councillor and officer training. As part of the West Midlands buying consortium forum a common standard for contractors on race equalities has been developed gaining national recognition. E-procurement is resulting in significant savings. A reverse auction for stationery and consumables, carried out on behalf of the Central Buying Consortium in 2005, delivered total savings of £1.8 million over four years. However, the Council has yet to explore savings that may be realised through rigorously market testing in-house services.
- 63 Partnerships are used effectively to build capacity. A number of strong and successful partnerships are in place, not least the Coventry Partnership. The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has pooled resources to target drug misuse. Capacity is enhanced further by voluntary organisations directly providing services and attracting external funding. For example the Prince's Trust, supported by Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, is delivering a programme aimed at supporting children and young people at risk of exclusion. Effective partnerships and pooling of resources are increasing capacity to deliver corporate objectives.
- 64 The Council is mainstreaming equalities into service delivery and employment. There are corporate targets around recruitment, retention and training. The approach to equalities has resulted in an improved take-up of services including support services for victims of domestic violence. A clear approach to diversity in service provision is ensuring services are accessible to all, and employees are representative and have an understanding of the communities served.
- 65 External and internal communications are effective and improving. A draft communication strategy addresses the key elements of media relations and effective internal communications. A lively quarterly magazine 'Citivision' is distributed to every household and a comprehensive information leaflet about council services is distributed with the annual council tax bill. Improvements in internal communications include a monthly staff newsletter, distributed with payslips, improved intranet information and plans for team briefings to cascade information to all staff in a clear and consistent way.

## Performance management

- 66 The Council is performing well in this area. Robust performance management has contributed to the strong recovery made by the Council since 2002. A clear performance management framework allows priorities and targets to be cascaded through the organisation. Performance management is strong in key partnerships. Councillors are closely involved in developing and monitoring plans and performance. Staff understand performance targets and how they perform against them. Although performance improvement has been strong in some areas it is less so in others. While most Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) targets have been met, performance on best value performance indicators (BVPI) is weaker. The Council recognises areas of weakness and plans have been developed to address them.

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

- 67** A robust performance management framework is in place. It has a clear reporting structure and straightforward plan hierarchy. The Corporate Plan sets out corporate and management objectives and fifty targets. These are cascaded through cabinet member strategic plans and operational plans to personal targets. Consequently staff have a good understanding about how their actions contribute to broader service and corporate objectives. Performance reporting is transparent. Detailed half yearly reports on progress on the Corporate Plan and cabinet member plans are submitted to cabinet. This includes a clear assessment of progress against plan objectives and identified actions to address underperformance. Effective performance management processes enable the organisation to focus on the delivery of priorities and to understand how the Council is performing.
- 68** Cabinet members and senior opposition councillors are well informed about performance. Cabinet members are closely involved in producing their strategic plans and monitor progress with senior managers at least quarterly and more frequently around areas of particular concern. For example, benefits service performance against target is monitored each month and action plans revised accordingly. This has resulted in significant improvement; the time to process new claims has improved from 50 days in January 2006 to 35 days in March (against a target of 40 days). Regular meetings between senior officers and opposition councillors scrutinise both qualitative information and performance indicators. The emphasis on performance monitoring by individual cabinet councillors relies on their capacity to fully understand and challenge the data presented by officers. Councillors generally have a strong grasp of performance in their own services but some lack a good understanding about the overall performance of the Council.
- 69** The operational plans provide an effective framework for linking corporate and portfolio plans to detailed actions but their use is not consistent. A standard template addresses the previous year's performance and sets out detailed plans including targets, timescales and individual responsibility for the coming year. The plans make the links between the corporate plan, portfolio plans and service objectives. Some plans lack clear measurable outcome targets and timescales.
- 70** Directors are held accountable for service performance and staff understand their role. The Chief Executive and directors are set performance targets which relate, in part, to the corporate plan and performance is appraised and recorded through separate interviews with both ruling party and opposition councillors. Staff are clear about how they are performing and the connection between their actions and corporate objectives.
- 71** The Council uses external evaluation and challenge to deliver improvement. Following the CPA in 2002 an improvement plan was produced. This provided an effective framework to deliver improvement. Consultants undertook a review of the performance management framework in 2004. This found significant progress in implementing and improving performance management across the organisation.

- 72 Effective performance management is improving some key services. Social care has improved from zero to two stars in two years. Performance of both the Council and PCT is jointly assessed against the Coventry charter for social care which sets out clear standards for service users. Where performance is below target or where there is inconsistency, identified action is taken and progress monitored. Quality of life outcomes have improved, such as reduced fear of crime, increased employment and health. Most of the LPSA targets have been achieved. Performance on BVPI s is less strong. Fifty-six per cent of BVPI s improved between 2002/03 and 2004/05. Target setting is not robust in some areas. The Council is addressing this through training and development.
- 73 Performance management of key partnerships is strong and influences the allocation of resources. The Coventry Partnership's management systems allow for sharing of performance management information in an effective way. Each theme in the Community Plan is supported by an action plan which sets out key tasks, milestones and success criteria. Services commissioned from the voluntary sector are based on delivering outcomes and performance management is integral to contracts. Community safety performance monitoring recently identified a significant increase in nuisance incidents caused by motor cycles. This has led to the installation of bollards to restrict access and re-allocation of funding to support the police in the purchase of off road motor cycles to combat the problem. This decision was taken to help enable the delivery of the priority to improve community safety and target more deprived areas of the City. Effective performance management of partnerships supports the delivery of shared objectives.
- 74 Performance management is enabling the reduction of service costs. In support of the ambition to improve the quality and efficiency of services the use of agency staff has been significantly reduced. Departmental expenditure is monitored quarterly together with an analysis of the reasons for using agency staff and strategies to reduce use. Effective performance management resulted in significant reductions, for example, 50 per cent in the Finance and ICT Department for the last quarter of 2005/06.
- 75 A comprehensive complaints, compliments and comments system is in place and results are analysed and reported to Cabinet members. This has led to improved services, for example children who are looked after are now provided with suitcases to cease the practice of moving belongings in black plastic sacks.
- 76 The Council is developing means of comparing and assessing performance in complex areas where comparison is difficult. Coventry participated in a two-year data collection exercise of the Audit Commission's economic regeneration performance indicators in order to develop comparable performance indicators. This provided information about the labour market, employment, skill levels and demography, as well as local information such as number of people using the city centre.

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

- 77** There is an inconsistent approach to setting and monitoring customer service standards. The Council recognises this and has used benchmarking information to set new standards and develop a customer services strategy. This aims to improve consistency through improved monitoring, for example, through the use of mystery shopping.

## What has been achieved?

- 78** The Council is achieving well, consistently above minimum requirements. Local priorities are consistent with national objectives and are used effectively to enable focus on improvement for residents and visitors.
- 79** The Council is contributing to quality of life improvements for residents. According to the Coventry Partnership's annual household survey 88 per cent of people think their neighbourhood is improving and satisfaction with Coventry as a place to live has increased from 76 to 82 per cent. Over the last five years, life expectancy of males living in Coventry has increased, moving towards the England average. The latest published data shows that overall life expectancy has increased by approximately three years in all areas of the city.
- 80** The Council continues to work effectively to develop sustainable communities. Successful focus on regeneration has contributed to a reduction in deprivation and increased employment. Targeted initiatives have ensured that those in more deprived areas have improved employment opportunities. The Council is on target to meet the 2010 decent homes standard. The housing strategy is aligned with community and Council ambitions for the area and seeks to provide both affordable housing and more aspirational housing to attract more affluent residents and therefore bolster the local economy.
- 81** Strong partnership working and sustained effort has significantly reduced both crime and fear of crime. Efforts to combat crime and improve health are targeted in accordance with need and therefore reflect the strong aim to improve equalities. The focus on smoking cessation recognises that this is the most significant cause of the difference in life expectancy across the city. Multi disciplinary work with health partners ensures effective services are provided to the most vulnerable. Most children and young people are healthy and effective prevention and support enables older people to remain independent.
- 82** The Council is making good progress in meeting the needs of children and young people. Corporate objectives recognise children and young people are critical to the long term development of the City. Although educational attainment at 16 years old is below the national average there is an overall trend of improvement in educational achievement. Most schools perform well and young people are well prepared for working life. A good range of well-publicised support services and activities help young families to improve their economic well-being.
- 83** In accordance with the corporate objective access to services continues to improve and communities and service users influence provision. Whilst service quality is generally good, costs are high in some areas. Although efficiency savings have been achieved it is recognised that value for money could be improved.

## Sustainable communities and transport

- 84 The Council can demonstrate some significant achievements in the areas of regeneration, housing and transport. Mixed performance in some environmental services has been recognised and investment increased.
- 85 The Council has worked successfully with a range of partners to regenerate the city creating a diversified range of new jobs for local people. The Council led on the development of the Ricoh arena and retail site, buying derelict and contaminated land and establishing a joint venture company to create 2,500 new jobs. Job opportunities were actively promoted in deprived communities. Over 1,000 people were assisted into work of whom 768 were previously unemployed. Eighty per cent were from Coventry, 44 per cent from the priority wards and 47 per cent from minority ethnic communities. This approach is now being adopted for other developments. Initiatives, including 'Change It' and the Broad Street centre, have been targeted at increasing the employability and business skills of young people. Close working with Jaguar has enabled their relocation within the City and the recent announcement by Delamar of plans to create 2,000 manufacturing jobs on the Browns Lane site by 2007. The Council has helped attract foreign investment and over 330 foreign companies now have a presence in the city.
- 86 Performance in planning, which is important to the Council's regeneration and development ambitions, is inconsistent. The time taken to process planning applications improved significantly between 2002/03 and 2003/04 but the trend was reversed between 2003/04 and 2004/05 for both minor and major applications, which are now close to the average when compared nationally. User satisfaction was in the worst quartile when this was last surveyed in 2003. A restructuring of the planning and transportation service aims to improve the performance of development control and increase customer satisfaction.
- 87 The Council has taken a clear lead in seeking to influence the range and distribution of housing stock. Its housing strategy reflects the ambition to increase the number of affluent people living in the city and improve the range and quality of affordable housing. The strategy sets targets for the mix of social and affordable housing for each post code. There is also a strong emphasis on using housing to promote independent living particularly where this will lead to an overall reduction in revenue expenditure. Significant measures have been put in place to support the delivery of the strategy including a Strategic Housing Regeneration Fund of £12 million (funded from Right to Buy receipts), supplementary Planning Guidance and the systematic use of planning gain. The Council has engaged partners and communities in meeting the housing needs of children and vulnerable groups. For example, a direct access hostel has been opened for young people not living with their parents and there is an agreement with the largest housing association to provide accommodation for children leaving care.

- 88** Coventry is on target to meet the 2010 target for decent homes in social housing. There is a £240 million housing association led programme to improve housing. Eighty three per cent of the 23,000 public sector homes currently meet the standard. A stock condition survey estimated that £190 million is needed to bring the owner occupied stock up to a good standard of repair. An equity release scheme has been developed with other West Midlands councils but take up so far has been very low which threatens the aim to reduce disrepair in the private housing stock.
- 89** An effective approach, using a range of initiatives, is taken to promote energy efficiency. Council investment of £300,000 is matched by private sector contributions across three local schemes. Average energy efficiency in the city has improved.
- 90** Performance on homelessness is strong. The number of statutorily homeless families with children in temporary accommodation has remained low for the past 18 months – an average of twelve households in 2004/05 and nine in the first quarter of 2005/06.
- 91** Overall performance on environmental issues is mixed but recent investment is beginning to have an impact. Waste recycling has continued to improve between 2002/03 and 2004/05 from a low base, but the comparative position has slightly worsened. The Council achieved 17 per cent recycling in 2004/05 against a statutory target of 18 per cent. The current year's performance has also been adversely affected by strike action associated with the implementation of single status. In 2004/05 performance was poor for the percentage of land significantly littered. In 2003/04 satisfaction was poor for street cleanliness and waste collection. However, in 2005 Coventry was one of only two councils to be awarded Beacon status for effective environmental health. The Council is aware of the importance of improving the appearance of the City to its broader ambitions such as attracting investment for economic regeneration. Additional resources are being targeted to areas of weaker performance. In 2006 the Council plans to increase kerbside recycling from 26 to 85 per cent of households for green waste and from 52 to 100 per cent for paper recycling.
- 92** The Council is working with partners in the West Midlands to develop plans to tackle traffic congestion. A successful joint bid was made from the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority to the Transport Innovation Fund for a feasibility study into ways of reducing congestion. There are also two established park and ride facilities serving the city and investment is targeted at increasing bus use to offset a decline. Bus use has steadily declined, from 23 per cent of all journeys in 1997 to 18 per cent in 2003 and was in the worst quartile for 2004/05. The Local Transport Plan has delivered £42 million towards the Primelines project which is designed to produce a network of five high quality bus routes. This is being developed in phases and is not yet having a significant impact.

- 93 The condition of roads had declined to become amongst the worst nationally. However, this problem has been recognised and an additional £10 million was allocated from the 2005/06 budget to begin to tackle the backlog in repairs. A further allocation of £10 million has been included in the 2006/07 capital programme. A major PFI bid has been prepared for the replacement of street lighting with improved, energy efficient lights.

## Safer and stronger communities

- 94 The Council is an active and respected member on the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). Partners value the leadership that the Council has brought, particularly with the Chief Executive chairing the CSP. Performance management is effective with comprehensive data exchange between agencies. The Council's commitment is illustrated by its investment. Mainstream funding has been made available for 75 street wardens and an additional 12 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). The community safety service achieved beacon status in 2000/01 and was subsequently selected as a national pilot for Operation Greenbay - targeted action against drug dealing. The Council is delivering its corporate objective to create a city where people feel safe.
- 95 Action to tackle crime, particularly in identified priority areas, has been generally successful. There has been an overall 9.6 per cent crime reduction over the four years from 2001/02 to 2004/05. Priority crimes that have been successfully targeted include; youth offending reduced by 24 per cent; domestic burglary reduced by 26 per cent (in the period 2002-05), exceeding the annual 5 per cent reduction target. Robberies have reduced by 3 per cent compared to the target of 10 per cent. This has resulted in a fall of relative performance (for robberies) from above average to below average between 2002/03 to 2004/05.
- 96 Fear of crime is also reducing. The LSP annual survey identified that 94 per cent of people now feel safe compared with 92 per cent in 2004. Effective media management assists this. In reducing crime and the fear of crime the Council and its partners are making good progress towards the objective to create a city where people feel safe.
- 97 Crime and disorder is successfully mainstreamed into the delivery of front line services. Activity is also co-ordinated well with partners. A fortnightly meeting between partners and key Council services includes use of robust multi-agency and service data to identify crime hotspots. Services are then delivered to tackle these. For example, City Services respond quickly to position the security cameras to crime hotspots. A gating scheme helps to reduce opportunist burglaries and the anti-social use of entryways. One hundred and fourteen gates have been installed across the city in 2005/06. The Coventry & Warwickshire Community Safety Scheme provides domestic security, free of charge, to older people, people on benefits or victims of crime. Over 5,400 properties were secured between 2002/03 and 2004/05. This co-ordinated approach between Council services and partners is resulting in focused and effective responses to emerging crime issues.

- 98** Effective action is taken to deal with anti-social behaviour. Consultation with statutory, voluntary and community organisations has resulted in a strong working relationship between them and the Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) co-ordinator. A programme of ward based activity targeted at young people at risk of committing anti-social behaviour resulted in reduced levels of offending and the Coventry PAYP programme has been used as good practice by the Home Office.
- Full use is made of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). Five of the 60 ASBOs issued to date involve exclusion from the city centre. Mediation is used to resolve neighbour disputes and victims of anti-social behaviour are also supported. Tackling anti-social behaviour contributes to a number of the corporate objectives, not least to create a city where people feel safe.
- 99** The Council and its partners have a clear and comprehensive approach to dealing with hate crime and domestic violence. Appropriate strategies are either in place or being developed. The Hate Crime Reduction Partnership takes a multi agency approach to racial and other forms of harassment and abuse. Effective action includes delivering high profile campaigns and aims to raise the profile and reduce the incidence of such crime.
- 100** Drug and alcohol misuse is appropriately targeted. The Drugs Action Team has been effectively integrated into the CSP. There is a clear target driven approach to reduce substance misuse. National Treatment Agency targets for drug treatment are, on the whole, being met. Focussed support is provided to drug misusers and their families including workshops for particular groups such as parents, carers of users and drug users from minority ethnic communities.
- 101** The Council works well with partners to reduce accidents. It has signed up to a public service agreement (PSA) to reduce the number of those killed or seriously injured in road accidents. Performance from 1994 to 2004 matches that of the best 25 per cent of councils nationally, with a significant reduction in deaths or serious injuries. There has been a 25 per cent reduction in child casualties in the same period. Claims against the Council for highway related incidents have fallen by a third. However, the number of those slightly injured has increased significantly and is amongst the worst nationally.
- 102** The Council has comprehensive arrangements in place with partners in the event of emergencies. Issues regarding the needs of different faith communities in emergencies are effectively addressed. There is a clear approach to supporting local businesses in their development of business continuity plans. However, not all Council services themselves have robust plans for continuity which exposes the Council to risk.
- 103** The Council is working well towards its values for community cohesion. The high profile Celebrating Coventry campaign seeks to ensure that the diversity of the people and communities in Coventry is appreciated and positively valued. The campaign has been externally recognised with a Viacom Outdoor Media award. A leaflet produced by the Coventry Partnership aims to dispel myths around asylum seekers.

Such action to combat racism, hate crime, bullying and intolerance is helping to achieve the community plan goal of building more cohesive communities.

## Healthier communities

- 104** The Council works well with partners to tackle health inequalities. 'Health of Coventry' is a theme group of the Coventry Partnership comprising statutory and voluntary bodies which has developed a plan for reducing health inequalities. Commitment is cross party. Following the last election the new ruling group committed to the same objectives and actively engaged in the Smoke Free Coventry campaign. The Council's health development unit works closely with the Primary Care Trust's (PCT) health promotion service using a single service plan which is based on detailed data comparing inequalities in Coventry.
- 105** Partners work with the Council to actively promote healthier communities. There are good services to improve the health of children and young people. These include participation in schools based initiatives for sport, healthy eating and education about sex and relationships. Access to children's mental health services is good. School nurses receive support and training in recognising and dealing appropriately with mental health issues. Provision for physical health promotion is good across primary and secondary care. The Lady Godiva half marathon project originated from the Health of Coventry Group. The Council takes a systematic approach to smoking cessation, introducing smoking cessation programmes for Council staff, appointing a smoking co-ordinator and has drafted a Smoking Strategy for the city. However pressures on the budgets in the health economy could hinder some health inequalities work as the PCT health promotion unit may reduce its staffing.
- 106** Services are targeted at the most vulnerable. Where appropriate, health services are targeted towards Asian women through places of religious worship. 'Healthy Horizons' helps people with predominantly mental health problems to return to work. There are specialist GP and maternity services for asylum seekers and homeless people at the Meriden and Anchor centres and tobacco chewing reduction schemes for the South Asian community at the Muslim Resource Centre. Services are meeting the needs of people in the most vulnerable communities.
- 107** Partners are working together to provide a multi-disciplinary model of family support. For example, health visitors are now consulted before any planned eviction resulting in some evictions being prevented. Young mothers are supported by young parents' advisers at some SureStart projects. Young mothers who are unable to live with their families have suitable accommodation, for example, at Griffin Court, Acorn Court and Valley House. The outcome is integrated service delivery for families, mothers and children.

The health of people of Coventry is improving as a result of the health inequalities strategy. Life expectancy for men and women has increased, reducing the gap with the England average and, for women, reducing the gap between the most deprived and the most affluent areas of Coventry. Male deaths from coronary heart disease in disadvantaged areas have halved over the last five years and stroke deaths in disadvantaged neighbourhoods have reduced to almost the city average. Teenage pregnancies have reduced by 12.8 per cent since the base year of 1998. Although this is still higher than the national average, the gap is beginning to close.

## Older people

- 108 The Council has led the development of a comprehensive strategic approach towards delivering services for older people, increasing independence beyond care needs and focussing on well-being. The older people's partnership is central to the strategy and comprises the Council, PCT, hospital trust, Pension Service, Police, Fire, voluntary organisations and older people's representatives. The partnership manager routinely comments on the Coventry Partnership theme groups' service plans so that they take account of the needs of older people. This has resulted in the transport theme group arranging a consultation event with older people. Older people's champions in the Council and partner agencies challenge age discrimination so that developments consider the needs of older people.
- 109 The Council is supporting independence. Housing is recognised by the Council as central to supporting independence in older people. The recently published older person's housing strategy aims to increase supply and choice. It contains practical means to support older people in their own homes or to move to more appropriate housing. The Council is supporting more people to live independently than the national average.
- 110 There is a growing awareness across the Council about the needs of older people. This is starting to have an impact, such as improved lighting of approaches to bus shelters and the falls reduction programme. Adult education, libraries, sport and leisure are co-ordinated to improve the lives of all residents. Developments include a reminiscence project at the Herbert centre and plans to provide aerobics, salsa classes and tea dances although the numbers involved are limited.
- 111 Older people are actively involved in determining the strategic direction and in shaping some services. The Council makes clear efforts to engage with older people whose voices are not usually heard. In addition to the older people's network there is a Black and Minority Ethnic Elders forum, a Care at Home group, a Nursing Home Network and a hospital users group. These have resulted in older people being involved in audits of hospital discharges, training professionals in the falls prevention programme and training bus drivers to understand older people's needs. Black and minority ethnic elders identified the need to adapt residential services to meet the needs of Asian older people. This has been addressed in the housing strategy.

They also identified transport, lifelong learning, information, pensions and benefits, support for carers and employment issues as priorities. However, the impact on service provision is currently limited and some older people feel that their views are not always heard.

- 112 Communication with older people is effective. The older people's partnership has a communications strategy which ensures communications are suitable for older people, for example plain English, font sizes and additional languages. The partnership resisted developing communication means exclusively for older people but targets information for them in publications for all.
- 113 The Council and its partners promote the independence of older people with a range of services. These include increased intermediate care services and increased intensive home support care leading to reduced hospital admissions, shorter hospital stays and fewer people in residential care. The 'New Homes for Old' initiative replaced five traditional care homes with 700 extra care homes in the community increasing the independence of significant numbers of older people. The Council is developing assistive technology, for example using falls bracelets and diabetes monitors linked electronically to a central location and remote monitoring of tele-medicine. A benefits co-ordination group, including the Department for Work and Pensions ensures that older people claim full benefits. Direct payments are above the national average and increasing. All over 85s and any over 65s who are triggered by contact with services have a full health, well-being and home security check that signposts support services. However, when older people without English as a first language visit Council offices, they are not consistently offered the use of interpreters.

## Children and young people

- 114 Partnership working in the city is long standing and strong and is effective in improving the range of services for children and young people. The Council has a clear vision for the development of an integrated children's service which has been developed with partners and children and young people. While some service costs remain high, these are in line with similar councils and outcomes are improving. Services provide adequate value for money overall.
- 115 The Council has worked well with local partners to reduce teenage pregnancy rates. Although still above national levels, these are reducing more quickly than average with particular improvement over the last two years. There is effective interagency working for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The annual health check rate for looked after children has improved significantly and is now above the national average.
- 116 The systems and processes for safeguarding children and young people are effective and supported by strong local partnership arrangements. The children's social care workforce is stable and Criminal Record Bureau checks take place for all staff working with children and young people in the city. Significantly more children and young people are having their needs assessed promptly than in the past. Casework practice has improved considerably over the last three years but a few cases show a pattern of premature case closure followed by re-referrals.

There are some inconsistencies in implementing protocols between different social care services and in the use of police powers. Good, targeted multi-agency work assists and supports families most in need to access appropriate services. The introduction of the Common Assessment Framework has been well supported by all agencies and is beginning to have a positive impact on children and young people. The numbers of children on the child protection register have reduced but remain higher than national and local comparators.

- 117** Most schools perform well. Where improvement is required, the Council is good at identifying timely action to bring this about. No schools in the last two years have been identified as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures. There is a continued trend of improvement for most pupils, when results are compared with similar areas. However, for 16-year-olds, attainment remains below the national average although Coventry had its highest proportion gaining five or more A\*-C GCSE this year. Differences remain in the educational achievements of children from minority ethnic backgrounds but the Council has been successful in narrowing the attainment gap for some young people from black and minority ethnic groups. Children and young people for whom English is an additional language make good progress. Good support is available for looked after children who make adequate progress up to the age of 11. However, at 16 they perform significantly below the level of other young people in Coventry. Attendance is improving but the capacity of the education welfare service to support continued improvement is limited. A small group of looked after children miss too many days schooling. Effective support helps children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make generally good progress.
- 118** Most children and young people, including those who are looked after, young people who offend and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have the skills and confidence to comment on and influence issues that matter to them through participation in an impressive range of consultation activities. Councillors respond well to their views and have agreed that all reports presented to them will include an assessment of the likely impact on children and young people. Excellent multi-agency partnership activity has dramatically reduced anti-social behaviour.
- 119** The Council works well with partners to ensure that children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared well for working life. Good advice and guidance and an extensive flexible curriculum are helping to retain a high proportion of young people in education. Achievement rates for most 16- to 19-year-olds are improving. The Council works effectively with partners to attract inward investment and develop services to support new jobs. Ninety-five per cent of children and young people responding to a survey carried out for the inspection said their life is quite or very enjoyable. The authority takes strong positive action to encourage young people who are looked after to remain in education, employment or training. Collaborative working across the partnership is improving provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## 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 Coventry City Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 6-17 March 2006.
- 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.