

Corporate Assessment Report

February 2008



Corporate Assessment

Liverpool 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 0844 798 7070.

© Audit Commission 2008

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

Contents

Introduction	4
Executive summary	6
Areas for improvement	9
Summary of assessment scores	10
Context	11
The locality	11
The Council	12
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	14
Ambition	14
Prioritisation	16
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	19
Capacity	19
Performance management	23
What has been achieved?	25
Sustainable communities and transport	26
Safer and stronger communities	28
Healthier communities	30
Older people	32
Children and young people	34
Appendix 1 – Framework for corporate assessment	37

Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty, under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003, to make an assessment, and report on the performance of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.
 - What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?
 - Ambition
 - Prioritisation
 - What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?
 - Capacity
 - Performance management
 - What has been achieved?
 - Achievement
 - Considered against the shared priorities of:
 - sustainable communities and transport;
 - safer and stronger communities;
 - healthier communities;
 - older people; and
 - children and young people.
- 3 Corporate assessments are normally aligned with a joint area review of services for children and young people (JAR). In practice, this means that the Council's achievements in relation to children and young people are assessed using the evidence provided from the JAR. In addition, examples of outcomes and activity, which are relevant to the other themes and which are identified through the JAR, are considered within the corporate assessment.

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

Executive summary

- 5 Liverpool City Council is performing adequately. Liverpool has a good record of achievement. It has developed a shared ambition of being a 'Premier European City', with a supporting vision which addresses the key issues facing the city. City-wide and neighbourhood regeneration has been extensive and service performance has improved against many key indicators. However, whilst partners are clear and focused on the key issues in the vision, they are not always clear of the role they play in the various strategies and plans to deliver the ambitions. The Council has not identified what the success of the long-term vision will look like and the long-term benefits have not been identified. Member behaviour at times is poor and detracting from capacity. Financial standing is weak and the financial position is inadequate with a lack of alignment between priorities and financial resources. Whilst the quality of life for the people of Liverpool is visibly improving, continued improvement is at risk due to the absence of a long-term articulated ambition, too many priorities, member behaviour and financial capacity.
- 6 Community leadership is strong and improving. Liverpool has developed a shared ambition of being a 'Premier European City', articulated in the Sustainable Community Strategy, which is informed by a range of consultation processes. The vision is underpinned by a clear statement which recognises key issues facing the City. It states that the vision is '*Achieved by building a more competitive economy, developing healthier, safer and more inclusive communities and enhancing individual life chances*'. The Council with partners, particularly *Liverpool First*, (the local strategic partnership), have a clear understanding of the issues it faces which is reflected in its vision.
- 7 There has been extensive City-wide and community regeneration, supporting the shared vision. The Council has worked hard to attract over £3.3 billion of private investment in the city centre and £4 billion for other parts of the City. Significant projects such as the Waterfront, the Grosvenor development and the new Arena have resulted in long-term sustainable development, jobs and an increase in the City's population. It has also worked with partners and the community on local regeneration such as Project Jennifer and major housing regeneration such as in the Kensington area. Regeneration is transforming the city.
- 8 The Council and partners have effectively focused on the vision. There are six aims, underpinned by 23 priorities and measured by 32 key indicators which reflect the vision. These are articulated in the Corporate Performance plan and reflected in service plans with targets monitored by the performance management system. Whilst the vision is underpinned by priorities, these are less well known and understood. There are too many priorities which do not give a clear focus and there is also a lack of alignment between priorities and resources. The vision is the driver for partners and staff.

- 9 Performance management is supporting service improvements. There is a clear and established performance management framework which reflects the priorities. Performance improvement has been achieved, with effective action taken in a number of key areas. Managing performance with partners is good. Systematic challenge to target setting has been introduced. However, performance management of finances is not as effective and not all targets and supporting strategic plans are clear and measurable. Connections between service planning, financial management and corporate planning are not integrated and service plans do not fully reflect the cross-cutting role they could play.
- 10 There is an effective neighbourhood approach in the community. There are five neighbourhood committees which are well attended and underpinned by four thematic working groups to support each of the LAA blocks. Most members feel involved and have an identified community role. Effective community leadership is helping the Council to work in partnership supporting delivery of its vision.
- 11 The Council has an excellent range of partnerships which are supporting and delivering the vision. The Council's approach to crime is focused on local need and variations in crime across the city. As a result, there were over 200 Joint Area Groups projects undertaken in high crime neighbourhoods during the past three years. This has led to improved feeling of safety and reduced crime.
- 12 The Council has created a range of joint ventures to improve local services. As a result, benefits services and Council contact services have significantly improved. The voluntary sector is also being used to strengthen capacity and to target provision effectively to the most vulnerable. The Council is utilising a range of service delivery options to improve services.
- 13 Value for money is adequate and developing. Overall there is improving service performance and reducing council tax; however, whilst there is a good range of performance information there is not yet clear information on costs and how these compare. Work to identify cost savings, without detracting from service quality, is underway with service reviews. Procurement is improving with both a joint commissioning approach and work with other Merseyside councils, with savings achieved of approximately £4 million. A joint service approach is developing value for money and some savings achieved.
- 14 The approach to diversity is improving services but some processes are not fully embedded. The Council achieved Level 4 of the Equalities Standard in 2006/07 and aims to reach Standard 5 in 2008/09. A programme to address key improvement areas has led to raised educational attainment in Somali, Yemeni and Black British pupils through its youth work and the work of the youth engagement workers. However, the Council has not yet completed Equality Impact Assessments; the diversity training has a three year programme but is not prioritised on customer facing services; and some equality action plans need to be improved. The Council is having a positive impact on a range of groups but this will be enhanced with the completion of some key work.

- 15 Member behaviour at times is poor and affecting capacity. There has been inappropriate behaviour dealing with some officer issues. Information is sometimes 'leaked' to the press and other sources for short-term political advantage. Behaviour of some members at Council meetings is poor with personally abusive language used and aggressive behaviour regularly demonstrated. As a result, some members said that they would not speak at a Council meeting for fear of being shouted at or ridiculed. Trust between officers and members is not effective. Members recognise that the culture of the organisation is not appropriate and stated that the culture needed to change. Behaviour of some members is damaging the reputation of the Council which is recognised by all members.
- 16 The overall financial position is inadequate. The Council currently has an estimated overspend of approximately £3.4 million for 2007/08 although some corrective action is being taken. There are undefined budget gaps for 2008/09 and 2009/10 and increasing service pressures such as in some care services. Funding for the Capital of Culture is also not fully identified with a currently reported shortfall of around £20 million. There is a lack of long-term financial planning for funded projects and programmes. The Council receives approximately £230 million in grants which funds many key projects and programmes. However, the income of grant funding is time limited and in some cases, such as funding from Europe, it is reducing making it difficult to plan for the medium to long-term, in particular in support of key projects. There is also no plan for alternative methods of supporting the projects. Without clearer financial capacity the extent of improvement the Council can deliver will be restricted.
- 17 The Council has a range of achievements against national and local priorities, which are addressing key issues facing the community. These include: improving life expectancy; reductions in smokers of 5 per cent achieved by March 2007; and a 20 per cent reduction in the rate of teenage pregnancy since 1998. In housing regeneration - 72,250 homes are being refurbished and 3,750 demolished and replaced with new homes. There are year-on-year reductions in crime and disorder rates, including burglary, vehicle crime and robbery and violent crime. This includes exceeding the overall PSA1 target by over 33 per cent and a 2 per cent overall improvement in people's feelings of safety. However, the Council recognises that this is set against difficult challenges of below average life expectancy, above average crime levels, above average unemployment and some poorer performance such as in housing.
- 18 A range of quality of life issues have been improved but future sustainable improvement is at risk. Whilst the quality of life for the people of Liverpool is visibly improving, continued improvement is at risk due to the member issues, financial capacity and the need to establish a clear long-term ambition.

Areas for improvement

- 19 In order to continue to deliver long-term sustainable improvements, the Council with partners should action the following areas for improvement.

Future ambitions and delivery

- 20 The Council is developing its new Sustainable Communities Strategy. As part of this work with partners it is updating the vision for Liverpool, and establishing some specific targets of what success will look like in the long-term. This will inform the updated local area agreement priorities and targets and the Council's refreshed corporate priorities – which need to be clearer and more focused. The Council has recognised the need to further develop the infrastructure to support its wide and challenging improvement agenda. To underpin this, the Council needs to develop a clear set of strategies and supporting action plans for delivery such as in asset management and procurement.

Finance

- 21 The Council must develop its existing medium-term financial plan into a clear medium and long-term financial strategy taking account of all the risks and financial pressures it faces. It needs to build its reserves and working balances to an appropriate level. It should also develop effective cost to performance analysis to financially support effective delivery of priorities.

Organisational culture

- 22 Whilst there is a range of positive interactions between members, individual officers, partners and neighbourhoods, all Members recognise that some behaviour is inappropriate, affecting the reputation of the Council and detracting from capacity. Officers and members need to work together to develop clear protocols and instil a different culture to improve the working of the Council.

Summary of assessment scores

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

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

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

Context

The locality

- 23** The City of Liverpool is situated in the north west of England, within the metropolitan area of Merseyside. The Liverpool City Region also incorporates the local authority areas of Knowsley, Sefton, St Helens, Halton and Wirral. The City has good transport links provided by the M57, M62 and East Lancashire Road and is also serviced by good rail connections across Merseyside and further afield. A direct train service runs from Liverpool to London in just under two and a half hours. Liverpool is also served by rapid trans-global sea routes and two international airports; Liverpool John Lennon Airport is situated in Speke, south of the City and Manchester International Airport is less than an hour's drive away.
- 24** The total population in Liverpool is 436,100 (ONS 2006) making it the sixth largest city in the United Kingdom. Sixty-five per cent of the population are of working age, which is slightly higher than the regional and national average of 62 per cent. There are just over 88,100 children and young people in the City. Just over 10.8 per cent of the population (according to recent Council estimates) are from black and minority ethnic communities (BME).
- 25** Liverpool is the most deprived local authority in England, with high levels of unemployed and low employment. Crime rates are high and the City has some of the worst health inequalities in the country. There are above average numbers of people on benefits and incapacity benefit. The population has declined from 800,000 since 1945 to its present rate of 436,100. This has meant that the infrastructure of the City, including housing, declined as it is aimed at supporting a much larger population.
- 26** The City's employment rate is 63.5 per cent (December 2006) but this masks considerable spatial and other inequalities in relation to skills and employment. Liverpool has just under twice the national rate of working age adults with no qualifications (23.2 per cent compared with 14 per cent) but in parts of the City such as north Liverpool or Speke Garston this can be well over 50 per cent. The level of higher skills in the workforce is also lower than the UK and comparator cities. Only 21.5 per cent of Liverpool's working age population is qualified to NVQ Level 4 compared to 27.3 per cent nationally. The City has 74,630 benefit claimants, 26.3 per cent of the resident working population, and half of them are on incapacity benefit. Forty-five per cent of children and 29 per cent of people over the age of 60 years live in households that are income deprived.
- 27** The Council is in the last phase of an extended LSVT with the remaining 16,000 (approx) housing stock being transferred in March 2008. Many neighbourhoods in Liverpool are undergoing major changes due to market restructuring. However, despite significant progress in many neighbourhoods, concentrations of poor housing remain.

- 28 The City has some of the most deprived wards in the country. Twelve areas have been identified as having the worst health measured by a number of key diseases. The 12 areas together stretching from North Liverpool around central Liverpool is a key focus for action to reduce the high levels of ill health.
- 29 Liverpool is one of the most challenging urban environments in the country. There are just over 92,380 children and young people; 1,583 have a statement of special educational needs and 862 are in public care. Some of the challenges for the Council are that over 31.4 per cent of children are eligible for free school meals and children experience poorer health than in many other parts of the country.
- 30 Liverpool has some of the worst health inequalities in England and Wales. Male life expectancy is 73.4 years and female life expectancy is 78.1 years, meaning that on average, men and women in Liverpool live shorter lives than in the North West and England. Male life expectancy is the third lowest in England, and female life expectancy is the lowest.
- 31 Alcohol, smoking and childhood obesity are fundamental issues. Binge drinking rate in Liverpool is estimated as being the seventh highest in England and hospital admissions from alcohol-attributable conditions is the highest. With regards to smoking, Liverpool has the second highest death rate for over 35 year olds in England, with 1,030 smoking-related deaths each year. Early death rate from cancer is higher than the North West and England averages, and is second highest in England. Deaths from heart disease and cancer are decreasing steadily and 14,000 Liverpool residents have given up smoking in the last three years. Obesity levels in children are rising, with 11 per cent of children in Reception year (aged 5 to 6 years) and 18 per cent of children in Year 6 (aged 10 to 11 years) have been recorded as being obese. More than half of children have experienced dental cavities by the age of five.

The Council

- 32 Liverpool City Council comprises 90 councillors in 30 wards with 51 Liberal Democrats, 35 Labour, 3 Liberal and 1 Green. The Council's executive board comprises the leader of the Council and nine executive members, each with responsibility for a defined service area. There are eight overview and scrutiny committees, comprising seven select committees and one overview scrutiny committee. There are five parliamentary constituencies within Liverpool City Council – Garston, Riverside, Walton, Wavertree and West Derby.
- 33 The Council employs 19,000 full-time employees including school-based staff. Services are organised under five portfolios each managed by an Executive Director. The new Chief Executive, who was formerly the Director of Children's Services, was appointed in 2006.

- 34 The Council's net budget for 2007/08 has been set at £698 million. The total band D council tax for Liverpool for 2007/08 is £1,379 (just under 4 per cent increase from 2006/07). This is slightly above the average for metropolitan councils in England and 102nd overall, having formerly been the highest in England. The Council has identified £21 million worth of annual efficiency savings and will be investing over £230 million by way of capital investment. Key features of this include housing market renewal schemes, redevelopment of Pier Head public open spaces and the Building Schools for the Future programme. The Council also receives over £230 million in specific revenue grants for various projects and programmes such as Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.
- 35 The Local Strategic Partnership, *Liverpool First*, is a network of organisations, chaired by the leader of the Council and supported by a small executive team, providing support to partners and co-ordination of the Partnership and its work.
- 36 The Council has a range of partnerships which underpin much of its work. This includes three different economic regeneration partnerships one of which is Liverpool Vision, a public/private urban regeneration company which co-ordinates regeneration work across the City centre. CitySafe, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) is chaired by the Council's Chief Executive. There is also a joint partnership board looking at health and adult social care issues with the Council and Primary Care Trust (PCT).
- 37 The Council has a number of joint venture company structures. *'Liverpool Direct'* with BT delivers a range of services including One Stop Shops, call centre and benefits service. *Enterprise Liverpool* delivers street cleansing and highways and Glendale maintains parks and cemeteries.
- 38 The City was named as the European Capital of Culture 2008 in June 2003 and, in 2004, was awarded UNESCO World Heritage Site status. The Council is leading the Capital of Culture project through the Liverpool Culture Company which was established in 2000. The project encompasses an eight-year themed cultural programme with international festivals and events.
- 39 The structure of Liverpool's economy has significantly changed over the last fifty years. This has led to some significant and at times aggressive politics over the course of many years.

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

Ambition

- 40 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Liverpool has developed a shared ambition of being a 'Premier European City', underpinned by a vision statement that recognises its key issues. It is articulated in a range of documents including the sustainable community strategy, informed by a range of consultation processes and with clear short-term goals. However, whilst partners are clear of the key issues in the vision, not all partners are clear of the role they play in the underpinning strategies and plans to deliver the ambitions. The Council has not identified what success of the long-term vision will look like beyond 2013 and the long-term benefits have not yet been identified. The Council recognises this and is in the process of revising its long-term vision with Liverpool First, and the underlying priorities through both a city-wide and neighbourhood approach.
- 41 The Council has an established shared ambition of being a Premier European City. The ambition is underpinned by a clear vision statement which recognises key issues facing the City. The vision is '*Achieved by building a more competitive economy, developing healthier, safer and more inclusive communities and enhancing individual life chances*'. The ambition and vision was underpinned by consultation through *Liverpool First* and included the public sector, different industrial sectors and a range of stakeholders. It is supported by a series of short and medium-term goals found in strategies and service plans which have clear outcomes for local people, such as '*This is Liverpool - the plan for a European City*'. The Council's vision is addressing the key issues facing Liverpool.
- 42 The ambition does not extend beyond 2013. Whilst individual strategies are in place to support the key themes of the vision, some strategies only contain short to medium-term targets. Beyond 2013 there is a lack of a long-term co-ordinated strategic focus for Liverpool and its partners or what a successful premier European city will look like. This is recognised and the Council is undertaking an extensive process to revise and renew its ambition and priorities, including local engagement to redefine the vision with partners. Work on revising the vision and preparing the updated Local Area Agreement is giving the Council and partners a stronger focus. When a new vision and LAA is in place, the Council's Corporate Plan will need to be revised which will ensure the appropriate alignment with the community wide plan.

- 43 Strategies supporting the vision do not take a holistic approach to the key issues and are not fully co-ordinated. For example, Liverpool does not yet have a unified regeneration strategy. Three respective organisations have led on aspects of regeneration; these are being brought into one company with a draft strategy being developed for economic regeneration. The unification of major regeneration partnerships and an overarching strategy will give greater focus. Planning services also do not consider the wider possible role they could play such as in improving the health of people in Liverpool. Some individual strategies do not encourage the wider consideration of cross-cutting issues.
- 44 The Council is effectively focusing on the key issues within the vision. For example, to support a *more competitive economy*, partners see substantial and sustainable growth as key to improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of residents. This has been informed by ongoing consultation, which is corporately co-ordinated. The aim is to improve the reputation and standing of Liverpool to increase investment in association with the core cities, by establishing the ethos of the European City. One of the key planks of this awareness raising was the Council being awarded the status of *Capital of Culture 2008*. The Council also set aims to support a *competitive economy* by being less dependent on public sector investment and increase private sector confidence in the city, which is being achieved, evidenced by the private sector investment in business (such as Grosvenor investment) and housing. This vision has contributed to rejuvenating the economy and attracting investment.
- 45 Key issues identified in the vision above are clearly identified in the sustainable community strategy and underpinned by plans. The vision is the main driver which is understood by partners and is reflected in the Council's 23 priorities. For example, the Premier European City approach is identified in the Core Cities prospectus for Liverpool and crime issues are identified in the *CitySafe* plan. Whilst key plans and targets of the sustainable community strategy include the key issues; not all of the targets are specific or realistic. This has resulted in partners not consistently aware of the role they play in delivering individual strategies. Vision and ambitions are challenging but success may not be delivered without all partners understanding or delivering their role.
- 46 There is strong commitment to the improvement agenda. The Council is demonstrating strong and effective community leadership at a City-wide and neighbourhood level. This is recognised by partners. The Chief Executive and Leader are seen as accessible and proactive in their approach to partnership working. Partners, residents and the Council show a passion for Liverpool, supporting the desire to change. This was highlighted by the good attendance and enthusiasm of groups and individuals to engage in the neighbourhood agenda, such as in the Speke development. However, whilst member leadership in the short-term is focussed on the vision, in the long-term it lacks clarity due to the absence of the post 2013 strategic vision and due to short-term political influences. Strong leadership, partnership and local commitment is contributing to delivering the vision but the short-term focus of some members is having an impact.

- 47 Consultation and neighbourhood level partnerships are effectively supporting delivery of the vision. Effective data analysis and consultation has informed the Council's ambitious agenda and actions at a neighbourhood level, such as the redesign around Anfield. There was also public concern about safety and anti social behaviour in parks. The *Parks Safe* initiative was a partnership approach outlining respective key actions for the police and Council which allocated joint resources such as Quad bikes for the police. This supported the *Safer and more inclusive communities* vision, and resulted in crime down by 42 per cent in Sefton Park and robbery by 60 per cent in Princes Park.
- 48 The Council is strengthening its neighbourhood approach for delivery of its ambitions. Five partnership-based neighbourhood committees covering the entire City support each of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) blocks. These are well attended and most members feel involved and have an identified community role. Each committee has a neighbourhood agreement, following stakeholder and partner forums. Each agreement is supporting delivery of local agendas. For example, Tancred Park/Rockfield housing refurbishment was informed by neighbourhood engagement. Neighbourhood ambitions and consultation are informing service delivery.
- 49 The ambitions for children and young people are good and support *Enhancing individual life chances*. The Council, with its partners, has developed clear and consensual aims, mission, vision and priorities for children and young people. The Children's and Young People partnership benefits from well established strong relationships amongst partners and has wide representation from partner organisations. There is a shared vision on the development and implementation of integrated services for children in Liverpool. The plan demonstrates links and alignment of targets between the Local Area Agreement and the Council plan.
- 50 Effective use of the new LAA is supporting delivery of partners' ambitions. The LAA structure has established a City-wide agenda agreed across local agencies and the Government Office. It is supported by an effective performance management system. This system links to the Council's monitoring system with targets including reducing health inequalities and improving life expectancy. The updating of the LAA offers an opportunity for the Council and partners to develop a long-term vision, more measurable targets and clarify roles. Effective partnership working is improving delivery of joint objectives.

Prioritisation

- 51 The Council is performing adequately in this area. The Council and partners have focused upon the vision as it addresses the key issues facing Liverpool. Following change of leadership, the Council revised its six aims and underpinned these with 23 priorities, supporting the vision. However, there are too many priorities which leads to lack of focus. There is also a lack of alignment between priorities and resources.

- 52 The Council and partners have effectively focused on the issues identified in the vision. There are six aims, underpinned by 23 internal and external priorities and measured by 32 key indicators. These are articulated in the Corporate Performance plan and reflected in service plans with targets monitored by the performance management system. Whilst the vision is underpinned by priorities, these are less well known and understood and are short to medium-term reflecting the Council's ambition. The vision has been the driver for partners and staff in their planning and service delivery.
- 53 The priorities are aligned with the key vision. For example, the vision identifies *enhancing individual life chances* and in the priorities there is clear a commitment to *'improve outcomes for children'* by raising educational attainment. As a result of joint work, outcomes for the oldest pupils are improving at a faster pace than nationally. Priorities clearly focus on the vision.
- 54 The Council has proactively addressed a number of priorities. One of the Council's priorities includes reducing taxation and support for improving value for money. Clear political direction has resulted in a reduction in local taxation over a number of years, achieved by a series of efficiency drives. This resulted in the Council going from the highest level of tax to its present ranking of 102nd highest in ten years.
- 55 Priorities reflect a good balance between national and local issues. The Council has invested in the environment supporting both national and local priorities. At national level it invested in improving recycling and waste reduction. At local level it invested in environmental campaigns supporting local neighbourhood needs. National and local environmental priorities are being tackled.
- 56 The Council's key aims and priorities are not well known to partners. Partners and staff are clear around the issues in the vision but some see the aims and priorities as confusing and lacking focus. Consequently, they do not explicitly form the basis of joint planning. Staff and neighbourhoods choose which priority targets they include in their plans. This does not encourage consideration of cross-cutting priorities in service plans or inclusion in partners plans.
- 57 Corporate priority budget setting is under-developed. There is a lack of alignment between priorities, financial resources and medium-term financial planning. The Council has committed some funding to priorities which led to improvements but this is not consistent. There is a risk that some priorities may not be delivered.
- 58 The Council has been successful at attracting funding from external agencies to support priority delivery. For example, it has received £102 million between 2004 and 2008 as part of the Newheartlands HMRI (Housing Market Renewal initiative). This funding has been focused on a range of significant housing improvements both with Council stock and housing associations. Additional funding has supported priority issues such as housing and regeneration.
- 59 The Council is redefining its priorities. It recognises that the priorities are not well known and is reviewing and simplifying the priorities in 2008. This follows on from the recently held member away days and the work of Liverpool First to redefine the vision for Liverpool. Clear priorities will assist improved focus for services and budget allocation.

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

- 60** Strategies developed to deliver the vision are effective. The Council and partners have prioritised health issues facing Liverpool. They led a *SmokeFree Liverpool* campaign and developed a clear strategy which resulted in a 5 per cent reduction in smoking. Strategies are supporting delivery of the vision.
- 61** The Council has taken difficult decisions to improve services. It has redesigned domiciliary care services and closed local schools. For example it closed Speke School and opened Parklands High School. This led to improved attainment, attendance and behaviour, supporting the vision and priorities.
- 62** The approach to diversity is improving services but some processes are not fully embedded. The Council achieved Level 4 of the Equalities Standard in 2006/07 and aims to reach Standard 5 in 2008/09. A programme to address key improvement areas has led to raised educational attainment in Somali, Yemeni and Black British pupils through its youth work and the work of the youth engagement workers. However, the Council has not yet completed Equality Impact Assessments; the diversity training has a three year programme but is not prioritised on customer facing services; and some equality action plans need to be improved. The Council is having a positive impact to a range of groups but this will be enhanced with the completion of some key work.
- 63** Innovative delivery arrangements have been developed to support improved services in priority areas. There are a range of Joint Venture Company arrangements. For example, following transfer to Liverpool Direct, benefits are paid quickly and accurately and one stop arrangements have improved accessibility across the City. Joint venture working for street scene is well established with satisfaction up 45 per cent to 61 per cent in 2006/07 over five years. Priority services improved following alternative delivery arrangements.

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

Capacity

- 64 The Council is performing inadequately in this area. Members' behaviour at times is poor and some actions are adversely affecting capacity. The Council's overall financial position is inadequate. There is currently an estimated overspend of about £3.4 million for 2007/08, albeit corrective action is being taken, a £20 million funding gap for the Capital of Culture year and an undefined budget gap for 2008/09 and 2009/10. The medium-term financial strategy, budgets and the capital programme are not sufficiently aligned and developed. Single status has not yet been addressed and asset management is not assisting the Council to maximise its resources. However, the Council uses partnerships effectively to enhance capacity and new approaches to HR are being introduced to address some of the key strategic challenges.
- 65 Some member behaviour at times is poor. There has been inappropriate behaviour dealing with some officer issues. Information is sometimes 'leaked' to the press for short-term political advantage. The behaviour of members at Council meetings is poor with personally abusive language used and aggressive behaviour regularly demonstrated. As a result, some members said that they would not speak at a Council meeting for fear of being shouted at or ridiculed. 900 motions were put to Council by members in the last three years, all of which needed an officer response. Members recognised that they would not all be debated but then used the motions in promotional political material. The behaviour of some members is damaging the reputation of the Council.
- 66 Behavioural issues are adversely affecting capacity. Members stated that the culture of the organisation and Council needs to change. Trust between officers and members is not effective. This has resulted in information sharing not being as open as it could be. External support has been secured to address some of the relationship issues but there will need to be a commitment from all sides to be successful. Members from all parties recognise that the culture of the organisation is not appropriate and affecting capacity.

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

- 67** Scrutiny is not fully effective. There has been a good commitment to scrutiny with some good reviews undertaken by select committees, such as reviews by the Regeneration and Economic Development Select committee. As a result of local engagement in scrutiny, changes were made to major projects. However, there was a lack of clarity of the respective roles of the select and overview committees. A high number of call-ins to select committees results in large agendas, resulting in some important items not being fully discussed. Select committees were not fully effective as there should be fewer items with more strategic focus and clear officer support. Whilst there have been good reviews undertaken, effectiveness will be enhanced if the structure and relationships between select committees, the overview committee and the Executive Board are clarified.
- 68** In contrast, there is good and visible political and managerial leadership at senior level in delivering the vision. There has been strong and effective leadership in redefining *Liverpool First* and developing the neighbourhood agenda under the LAA blocks, resulting in a range of outcomes for neighbourhoods and supporting LAA targets such as in crime reduction and health improvement. When developing the new vision with *Liverpool First*, interactive events are being devolved to neighbourhoods. Service development is being defined locally and supported by partners. This is delivering an effective locally-based service model with partners included.
- 69** The approach to member development is effective. Portfolio holders have annual reviews. There is a good training programme for members and one course is supported by a university which can lead to an NVQ for members. Members feel well supported by their training and better equipped to undertake their role.
- 70** Relationships between senior officers and portfolio holders are effective. Clear roles and responsibilities have been established such as in children's services with regular budget and performance reviews. At a local level members receive good support from locality managers to support the strengthened neighbourhood approach. Relations between officers and members increase capacity.
- 71** The Council's overall financial position is inadequate. The Council has an estimated overspend of about £3.4 million for 2007/08 and an undefined budget gap for 2008/09 and 2009/10. Funding for the Capital of Culture is also not identified with a currently reported shortfall of around £20 million. The Council has increased its overall balances in recent years in spite of annual overspends on its revenue budget but these are still significantly below the minimum level advised by the Council's responsible financial officer and low levels of balances are already predicted for 2007/08. The collection fund deficit is high reflecting an overestimation of the levels of collection in previous years. The Council has also recognised a number of contingent liabilities and financial risks which could add to the financial pressures, as funding has not yet been identified. Without financial capacity this will restrict what improvements the Council will deliver.

- 72 The medium-term financial strategy, budgets and the capital programme are not sufficiently aligned and developed to deliver strategic priorities. Service and budget planning frameworks are not fully aligned. Service plans, therefore, do not adequately inform the medium-term financial plan. Although the Council finalised an integrated Corporate Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan in March 2006, it is not linked to an up-to-date medium-term financial strategy. Key plans are not integrated to maximise use of resources.
- 73 There is a lack of long-term financial planning for funded projects and programmes. The Council receives approximately £230 million in grants funding many key projects and programmes. However, the income of grant funding is time limited and in some cases, such as from the funding from Europe, it is reducing making it difficult to plan for the medium to long-term, in particular in support of key projects. Without clearer financial capacity and a plan for alternative methods of support or systematic review of what the Council wants to continue and what it wants to stop, this will restrict the extent of improvement the Council can deliver. For example a mentoring support scheme in schools had successfully increased attendance. When funding came to an end there was no strategic approach taken as to whether it should continue and so it only continued where schools could carry on the funding. Weak long-term financial planning for grants is leading to job insecurity and will limit ability to deliver priorities.
- 74 The approach to asset management is weak. Whilst there has been some good utilisation and rationalisation of assets, the Council is not maximising opportunities and the asset register is not a good source of information. For example, there was a proposal to hire accommodation at a cost of £40,000 when there was existing vacant accommodation in City buildings. Asset management is not giving added capacity to the organisation.
- 75 Risk management is adequate and developing. The Council has established a corporate risk register. Each service has its own risk register for service based risks which feeds the corporate risk register; however, it is not consistently used and some risks do not appear on the register. The risk register reflects service and corporate risks but a consistent approach is developing.
- 76 Value for money is adequate and developing. Overall, there is improving service performance and reducing council tax; however, whilst there is a good range of performance information there is not yet clear information on costs and how these compare. Work to identify cost savings, without detracting from service quality, is underway with service reviews. The Council and PCT is developing an effective joint approach with a joint commissioning group and strategy to deliver seamless services across the health and social care spectrum and encourage 'care and support in the community' for elderly people, whilst reducing costs. Procurement is improving with both a joint commissioning approach and work with other Merseyside councils, with savings achieved of approximately £4 million. A joint service approach is developing value for money and some savings achieved.

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

- 77** The Council has an excellent range of partnerships which is enhancing Council capacity. It has worked with *Partnership for Learning* which provided over 19,500 training days last year for over 11,500 people. This has given free training to unemployed people and supported training for low skilled workers in a range of firms across the City. Partnership working is leading to improved quality of life.
- 78** The voluntary sector is being used to strengthen capacity and to target provision effectively to the most vulnerable. For example Barnardo's work with the schools and the use of outreach for vulnerable families has significantly increased the use of children's centres with 55 per cent of children across the City registered with a children centre. Use of the voluntary sector is effectively enhancing services.
- 79** Partnership capacity is stretched. Neighbourhood structures are creating demands on partners and the voluntary capacity which may not be met. Partners all raised the difficulty of attending the range of neighbourhood meetings and how they will struggle to meet expectations for their participation. The Council has recognised this issue and is reviewing structures and prioritising attendance.
- 80** The Council is proactively developing its approach to HR but still have a range of issues to address. There is a good training and development programme for officers, linked to an annual review process. In recognition of the need to attract staff in certain areas, measures have included targeted recruitment campaigns, a strong focus on in-house professional training and development and the improvement of career paths, such as for social care staff and teachers. The Council with its partners on the Local Strategic Employment partnership promote diversity among the workforce across the city. The People Pool's 'Met Quarter' (annual) recruitment project, for example, showed that 37 per cent of successful candidates were from the BME community. Sickness is reducing, (from 14 days in 2003/04 to 10.4 days in 2006/07) although still above average. The HR strategy is still in draft and work has just started on the workforce development plan. Single status and pay equality have not been completed and the financial implications not been fully calculated. The Council's approach to HR is beginning to address challenges and improve capacity.
- 81** The Council understands its challenges in relation to capacity and is developing strategies. For example, there is a draft community cohesion strategy, a People Development strategy and work is underway to develop an IT strategy. Some supporting delivery plans are still being developed to support strategies, such as the plan supporting the procurement strategy. The Council has recognised the need to develop strategies and underlying delivery plans to ensure a cohesive approach which is properly resourced and kept under review.

Performance management

- 82** The Council is performing adequately in this area. There is a clear and established performance management framework in place which reflects the Council's 23 priorities. Performance improvement has been achieved, with effective action taken in most key areas. Managing performance with partners is good. However, not all targets and supporting strategy plans are clear and measurable and there is no systematic challenge to the level of targets set in the plans. Performance management of finances is also not fully effective partly because it is not supported by coordinated financial planning. Although links are evident between service plans and specific corporate priorities there is a lack of clarity of how services contribute to the Council's wider priorities.
- 83** The Council has established an effective performance management structure, supporting the vision and priorities. The performance management system is structured around the aims and priorities. Executive Board receives monthly reports by executive area and has exception reports on specific indicators when they are not achieving targets. For example, in June 2007, the indicator for length of stay in hostel accommodation did not hit its target. It was reported with a recommendation for the reallocation of resources and resulted in improving performance. Select committees receive monthly information for their portfolio areas. This led to service improvements. For example, the benefits service was poorly performing. Close performance management led to a range of changes and it now takes less than 28 days to calculate benefits and 90 per cent of calls are answered in 20 seconds. Performance management is improving services.
- 84** Target setting and action planning is not fully effective. Not all targets in the corporate plan are SMART. Managers select the three corporate priorities they feel their services most align to and consequently service plans do not routinely address the wider range of corporate priorities. Action plans supporting some strategies are variable with some plans not having clear milestones, timelines and targeted outcomes. There is also no systematic challenge to the level of targets set. The Council has recognised that it needs to strengthen its target setting for business and service planning. It is introducing quality control checks within portfolios, to ensure consistency in content and standard in 2008/09. Target setting is not fully effective and some plans do not reflect the wider corporate cross-cutting role which may hamper service delivery.
- 85** Performance management of finances is not fully effective partly because it is not supported by coordinated financial planning. There is a lack of co-ordinated financial planning which makes the performance of financial management less effective. The Council has not been effective in managing its finances. The financial position is weak; the Council has very low levels of balances and faces significant budgetary pressures and does not have an agreed strategy to meet these pressures. The existing financial capacity may therefore not be sufficient to achieve the Council's objectives, sustain performance, or promote improvement. Performance management of financial aspects is not supporting the Council's management or long-term delivery.

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

- 86** Performance management is reflecting the strengthened neighbourhood approach. Performance management is being established in the five Neighbourhood Areas. Four Neighbourhood Agreements have been completed around national shared priorities and the LAA and include local issues such as cleanliness of specific neighbourhoods and reductions in crime at a local level. Local targets are established and monitored to address neighbourhood needs.
- 87** Performance management is effective with partners and voluntary sector service providers. An LSP performance management framework has been introduced and well received. When providers do not perform effectively the Council has taken action, such as reallocating the recycling contract when performance declined. Grant aided partners operate under service level agreements, which are monitored and reported to the relevant department. If a service provider is not performing the Council has taken difficult decisions to terminate funding provided. Effective measurement of partners is enhancing the capacity of the Council.
- 88** Performance Management at a service level is effective. Children Services collects and analyses data on its services and monitors its service performance against clearly identified performance indicators, through the quarterly reporting review process. As a result, there have been improvements such as in the number of core assessments and duration times on the child protection register.
- 89** The Council involves the public in its performance management and is open to external evaluation. Service standards, as an integral part of service planning, is being established, with 71 per cent of services publishing standards. Some service performance is reported to various neighbourhood committees and forums. This led to changes in delivery such as the Respect Weeks. The Council also involves children and young people in some performance management through its youth parliament. The Council has an open approach to reviewing performance.
- 90** The Council has an effective corporate complaints system - *Have Your Say*. Comments, complaints and compliments are monitored and action is taken. Following complaints received, the process of housing repairs appointments is being changed and additional contractors are being allocated in tackling backlogs of repairs. An annual report is given to members to advise of areas of complaint and actions. The complaints system is supporting improvement.
- 91** Some members found performance information confusing and complicated and not explicit about the delivery of priorities. The Council is changing the presentation of its information following discussions with members. Quality of information is essential to optimise the effectiveness of members' input.
- 92** The performance appraisal system is effective. The Council monitors whether staff get appraisals and it is followed up. These take the form of a review of performance and target setting. Staff are made aware of the role they play in the key service targets but are less aware of the Council's overall priorities. Staff are set targets which support service delivery.

What has been achieved?

- 93** The Council performs well in this area. There is a strong record of achievement against national and local priorities; such as in health, crime reduction, recycling and regeneration at City and community level which supports the Council's underlying vision of '*building a more competitive economy, developing healthier, safer and more inclusive communities and enhancing individual life chances*'. Delivery of the vision is supported by good partnership work, a focus on specific needs in neighbourhood priorities and strong community leadership, set against reducing council tax increases. Performance management has supported some key achievements in priority areas with 60 per cent of indicators having improved since last year. The Council enhances capacity to deliver priorities by partnership work and attracting external funding. This has led to year on year improvement of performance and quality of life which resulted in improved public satisfaction. However, significant challenges remain including high crime rates, below average life expectancy, financial constraints and some areas of mixed performance such as housing.
- 94** There are clear achievements linked to national and local priorities:
- key health issues such as: improving life expectancy; reducing smoking, with a 5 per cent in the number of smokers achieved by March 2007; and a 20 per cent reduction in the rate of teenage pregnancy since 1998;
 - housing regeneration - 72,250 homes are being refurbished and 3,750 demolished and replaced with new homes. The Council is also completing the transfer of the last of its housing stock to a registered social landlord in order to achieve decent homes standard and there is an ongoing focus of building private residential developments such as at the old Garden Festival site;
 - the proportion of young people gaining five A*-C including English and mathematics was 36.7 per cent in 2006, slightly higher than statistical neighbours. Unvalidated data for 2007 at 40.5 per cent shows a significant increase of 3.8 per cent over the previous year and a better rate of improvement than nationally; and
 - year-on-year reductions in crime and disorder rates, including burglary, vehicle crime and robbery and violent crime. This includes exceeding the overall PSA1 target by over 33 per cent and a 2 per cent overall improvement in people's feelings of safety.
- 95** There has been extensive City-wide regeneration and significant community project achievements, delivered in partnership. The Council has worked hard to attract over £3.3 billion of private investment in the city centre and over £4 billion in other parts of the City which has led to economic confidence increasing. Local achievements have included rebuilding or refurbishing districts, such as in Speke, with a new integrated High School and community centre, district shopping centre and new Morrison's supermarket. As a result, 450 local jobs have been created in an area of 37 per cent unemployment, over 3,000 homes have been refurbished and crime has reduced by approximately 20 per cent.

- 96 The Council has effectively focused on reducing council tax and improving performance. The Council had the highest rate of council tax; therefore, Members adopted a clear policy led approach to significantly reduce local taxation from being historically the highest in England to being 102nd in ten years.
- 97 Access to services has improved. The total number of contact points across the city was previously 134, but each offered a partial and variable service. Now there are fewer, but each provides a comprehensive service. Outreach work has increased the number of callers to one stop shops from under represented groups from 3,000 to 23,000 and 90 per cent of buildings are now accessible to people with a disability. Staff at the contact centre and one stop shops are well trained and customer focused. Access for all residents is improving.
- 98 Resident satisfaction has improved. Overall satisfaction with the Council increased from 53 per cent to 56 per cent between 2005/06 and 2006/07 and there are increases in satisfaction in most key service areas such as recycling and benefits. Enhanced services are improving public satisfaction.
- 99 Performance improved against many key indicators. In the last year 60 per cent improved. The rate of improvement is 56th out of 388 single tier authorities and 27 per cent were in top quartile in 2006/07 compared to an average of 30 per cent for single tier authorities. Over the last three years 77 per cent improved which was ranked 82nd. Indicators highlight improvement achieved.
- 100 Annual assessments are showing good levels of performance with strong improvement. For example, adult services have improved from 'serving some people well' to 'serving most people well' and with promising prospects of improvement. The benefits service is judged excellent by the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate and Supporting People programme is now one star, with excellent prospects for improvement, up from zero star and uncertain prospects. Service judgements are showing improvements.
- 101 The Council still has a number of key challenges. Whilst demonstrating improvements, key issues include; the gap in health inequalities and below average life expectancy; high crime rates; and poor housing performance. Sustainability of improvement could also be at risk given the financial capacity issues. However, there are pooled budget arrangements and key projects and plans in place to address these, some necessarily over a long-term. These include a range of health plans such as the 'Liverpool Active City' and 'A Taste for Health' and ongoing significant housing and regeneration projects.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 102 The Council and its partners have achieved some significant improvements in the areas of sustainability, environment and paying benefits. There has been a range of successful corporately co-ordinated projects and developments in regeneration which have produced wide ranging benefits for the community. The city centre is now seeing a transformation of the retail and conference space in the city. There are new jobs. However, the Council has not yet established a corporate strategy for regeneration and housing performance is weak.

- 103** The Council is delivering an ambitious programme with its partners and various multi-agency bodies to reinvigorate Liverpool. It attracted £3.3 billion of private investment in the City Centre and £4 billion in other parts of the borough. Private investors have worked with the Council on significant schemes, such as transforming the docks, the Arena and Convention Centre, the Cruise Liner facility, Waterfront developments and retail centres. This has led to economic confidence increasing and an increase in visitors to the City from 250,000 to 650,000 over three years, 24,000 more jobs and 2 million square feet of new retail space. At neighbourhood level, successes include £300 million in Kensington for housing and environmental regeneration and a £150 million new district centre in north Liverpool (Project Jennifer) all informed by local community involvement. The visible investment from the public and private sector is making a real difference and enhancing the reputation of the City with investors.
- 104** The Council is addressing one of its key issues of getting people back to work. There are a range of initiatives to address the above average rates of unemployment and people on incapacity benefit. For example, people on incapacity benefit are a focus for the Council's LPSA target. The *Step Closer 2 Work* programme supports people on Incapacity Benefit with training and advice to get back to work. Last year it supported 102 clients with 50 returning to work.
- 105** Planning is supporting the Council's regeneration agenda but is not maximising some opportunities. The service is handling £4.5 billion worth of development schemes and secured maximum delivery grant for four years. It directed 96 per cent of new housing to brownfield sites. The web pages for developers have been enhanced with direct access to forms and drawings. However, development control performance overall is below average and the maximising of planning gain monies is limited. Planning is proactive with developers but is not maximising some opportunities.
- 106** The Council's approach to housing in Liverpool is improving. The Council is undertaking schemes to improve existing housing stock, partly funded by Housing Market Renewal Initiative monies. It is also transferring the rest of its housing stock (16,000 properties) to a registered social landlord by April 2008. The percentage of social housing that is non-decent has steadily reduced from 46 per cent in 2003 to 25 per cent as at 1 April 2007. The Council estimates that all sustainable RSL stock will meet the DHS, some through demolition and redevelopment. The Council is actively improving housing but this is long-term due to the volume and condition of properties and it recognises it will not achieve the DHS by 2010 for all private sector properties.
- 107** Housing management is poor but improving from a low base. There has been poor performance in collection of rent arrears and response times on routine and non-urgent repairs have been poor. Some improvements have been made in reducing the number of people staying in bed and breakfast and the time taken to complete non urgent repairs. The Council is taking action to improve performance which is still poor.

- 108** The benefits service has significantly improved. It pays benefits more quickly and accurately, having halved the time taken to process new claims from 57 days to 28 days. It introduced a user friendly benefits maximisation service which generated over £2.8 million of additional claims. Indications are that further improvements have been achieved in 2007/08. The service has also linked to other services such as free school meals, clothing grants and bus passes to assist applicants access a range of benefits quickly and efficiently. People most in need receive benefits more quickly and experience a more integrated service.
- 109** A Joint Venture partnership has improved performance across environment and street scene areas. Liverpool has 13 'Green Flag' awards for its parks. Public satisfaction rose to a four-year high in 2006/07. The Council is responding positively to the green agenda with the removal and enforcement of fly tipping given a 'good' rating by Defra in 2006/07. Recycling, having had low rates, is improving and on course to exceed the agreed dry and green recyclable targets for 2007/08 of 20 per cent. However, there is a risk in not meeting future targets and the impact of fines if these are not met. Environment services are enhancing the quality of local areas; as a result public satisfaction with street cleanliness has risen for four successive years.
- 110** The Council is effectively developing its approach to transport. One of the Council's priorities is to improve integrated transport planning and support improving the image of Liverpool. Local targets have included an ambitious programme to improve the approach into Liverpool from the M62, along Edge Lane and the airport. Edge Lane is underway with compulsory purchases to widen the main road approach and the tree-lined boulevard leading from the airport to the City is completed. Footway performance levels have improved to the metropolitan average following a £1.3 million investment over three years as part of the Local Public Sector Service Agreement. The new Local Transport Plan, developed in partnership with Merseyside neighbours, was assessed as excellent for the last two years. Satisfaction with bus services is in top quartile. Whilst bus usage is declining, measures are being taken to increase usage and further improve train usage. However, Liverpool is in the worst quartile for condition of principal roads and despite much time being invested in Merseytram, the project did not go ahead. Increasing public transport supports the Council's environment priority and economic accessibility, particularly with the Capital of Culture in 2008.

Safer and stronger communities

- 111** The Council plays a significant role in improving neighbourhood cohesion and reducing crime. Partners value the leadership the Council has recently brought to neighbourhood community safety, reducing anti-social behaviour and its support to a wide range of initiatives. Crime and youth offending rates have reduced and there is a 2 per cent overall improvement in people's feelings of safety; however, overall crime rates are still high.

- 112 The Council and partners can show a demonstrable reduction in crime. The LAA target of reducing crime by 22.7 per cent is on target to be met by 2008. There has been good success in reducing crime which has seen an 8 per cent reduction in the PSA1 target to reduce overall crime in 2006/07 compared with 2005/06 including a 20 per cent reduction in violent crime and a 10 per cent reduction in acquisitive crime. However, whilst domestic burglaries are down they are not expected to meet the PSA target. There is also a 2 per cent overall improvement in people feeling safe (measured by the Council's annual 'Feelings of safety' survey 2006). Liverpool's performance is above the CDRP family average and is projected to exceed LPSA targets with the exception of the domestic burglary target, which is marginally off target. Partners have worked on a range of schemes to effectively reduce crime and the fear of crime.
- 113 The Council works well with a range of partners to keep the city safe. The *Citysafe Partnership* is aligned to the LAA structure and chaired by the Council's Chief Executive, demonstrating a strong commitment with partners to the vision of *safer and more inclusive*. It also works effectively at cross-cutting agendas such as tackling the issue of underage cigarette sales which links to the health issue of '*SmokeFree Liverpool*'. The partnership is supported by monthly meetings of a performance management group (PMG). The structure of the partnership approach supports a city-wide and neighbourhood approach.
- 114 The Council's approach to crime is focused on local need and variations in crime across the city. There is a strong focus on addressing identified high crime areas, such as parks and rear alleys, local neighbourhood issues and community cohesion. These initiatives have included *alley gating* which has reduced the fear of crime and real crime in the City. There are many terraced houses with alleys at the rear of the properties which have been the focus of crime over a number of years. The installation of 5,500 locked gates reduced crime, with surveys showing people feel safer. Respect weeks have brought together up to 20 different agencies to focus on a specific neighbourhood area to address crime, tipping, and untidy community areas. As a result of the identification of local issues over 200 Joint Area Groups projects were undertaken in high crime neighbourhoods during the past three years resulting in crime and the fear of crime reducing.
- 115 Partnership work has resulted in reduced crime. Crime reduced to a 10-year low in the City Centre. The Council provides funding (£475,000) for the Gold Zone police team in the city centre which has delivered: high visibility policing; CCTV; taxi marshals; and pub watch. Partnership initiatives are reducing crime.
- 116 There is a strong multi-agency commitment to safeguard children in the community and the majority of children are provided with a safe environment. 'Operation Stay safe' reinforces parental responsibility for children out on the streets at night. Where the police have been granted dispersal orders to reduce antisocial behaviour in local areas, youth services provide positive diversionary activities for these young people. All schools operate anti bullying strategies and most young people feel safe from bullying. The police work closely with schools to help prevent involvement in anti social behaviour and crime including a targeted project with the youth service to address racially aggravated offences. There is an effective approach to safeguarding children.

- 117 Progress on reducing road deaths and serious injuries is good. The number of people killed or seriously injured on Liverpool's roads has decreased by 32.8 per cent in the last 9 years with an 18.4 per cent reduction on the 2005 totals. The number of children killed and seriously injured has reduced by 50 per cent and 30.7 per cent over the same time period. Attention by the Council and its partners to road safety is making children safer.
- 118 Crime remains high. Despite the reductions in crime achieved via a range of citywide projects and initiatives, crime is still high in Liverpool. The range of projects and neighbourhood meetings is a draw on capacity. The Council and partners have not yet prioritised which meetings to attend and which projects to take forward in order to continue the existing rate of neighbourhood success. A lack of prioritisation could result in crime rates not reducing further.

Healthier communities

- 119 The Council has improved health in Liverpool by effective partnership working to improve health and reduce health inequalities. There is good partnership working with a Partnership Board, shared posts such as the Director of Integrated Adult Health and Social Care Commissioning and the Director of Public Health. The Council is delivering against its health priorities and targets; such as reducing teenage pregnancy and increasing life expectancy, although life expectancy remains comparably poor. The Council works across services to address health issues for the whole community; however, it does not have a strategy to ensure all know the part they could play in improving health and has not undertaken, with partners a full health needs analysis.
- 120 Health in Liverpool is improving. Life expectancy of men and women is increasing although it is still amongst the worst in the country when compared with national averages. For example life expectancy increased from 71.2 years to 73.4 years for men and from 76.9 to 78.1 for women in the last 10 years.
- 121 The Council is addressing the issues affecting health. The Director of Public Health's report (2007) identified smoking as contributing to over 80 per cent of deaths from lung cancer. Therefore, a programme was developed, called *SmokeFree Liverpool*. This included lobbying for smoke free workplaces, which contributed to the subsequent legislation. The Liverpool Stop Smoking service was also established which supports a range of initiatives, including support for businesses as well as the Council's own staff getting counselling and patches. As a result, the rate of smoking has reduced from 35 per cent prevalence to 30 per cent. It also exceeded its target of number of quitters at four weeks with 4,710 in 2006/07 against a target of 3,783. Life expectancy is being increased by addressing the key health issues.

- 122** The Council's approach to alcohol misuse is effective. It has recognised that alcoholism is one of the key issues for Liverpool both in terms of health and other social and community implications. The binge drinking rate in Liverpool is estimated as being the seventh highest in England and hospital admissions from alcohol-related conditions is the highest. The Council has instigated a campaign, known as *Pssst - be alcohol aware*. The partners undertook research about alcohol use and have raised awareness of the implications of excessive drinking. This campaign has resulted in shared funding for various localised campaigns such as a film being made by youngsters and a consistent message from all partners delivered, although it is difficult to measure the impact.
- 123** The Council is working effectively to address underlying health issues. It is exceeding teenage pregnancy targets with a 20 per cent reduction since 1998. It introduced a campaign to address obesity and established an all partner Obesity Task Force. The Taste for Health Food and Health Action Plan for Liverpool (2006 to 2009) encompasses three main areas of action, with: community based initiatives; children and young people initiatives; and a focus on local employers and corporate responsibility. There is a clear childhood obesity action plan, with challenging 2009 targets, which includes increasing levels of physical activity where good progress is already being made. Focused campaigns are working to address the underlying issues affecting long-term health.
- 124** The Council and PCT have not yet completed a full assessment of need across the City. The Council and PCT are undertaking a Joint Strategic Needs Analysis. This will include a full needs and sensitivity analysis including the effects of migration, population trajectory and changing health expectations in relation to budgetary constraints. Some of the documents relating to health are PCT focused and there is no overarching health strategy for the city which would help all partners and Council departments know the role they play. Health information and supporting documents to define future provision are still developing.
- 125** The Council is committing investment to improving services supporting health. For example an additional £300,000 has been invested in the *Future Lifestyles initiative*, so that all young and older people can use health and leisure facilities free of charge. As a result, there has been a 63 per cent increase (180,000 extra visits) in children attending centres.
- 126** The Council is delivering services for vulnerable groups such as in areas of deprivation, for older people and children. There are focused health programmes for different needs of the community, for example the 'Heal 8' project addresses health promotion in the diverse communities in the area. In six of the most deprived wards health awareness campaigns are underway, focusing on cancer. Children's centres, all with dedicated oral health workers, are targeting work to improve levels of oral health and three centres are currently piloting an oral health screening tool. Liverpool's higher than average infant mortality rates are also being targeted through the children's centres' strategy including additional resources for ante-natal care, anti-smoking and breastfeeding support. The Council has good local awareness and is focusing health campaigns accordingly.

- 127** The Council is working with people from minority groups to improve health. For example, it supported asylum seekers to access allotments. It also raised the beds in the allotments so that people with disabilities could work on them more easily. The use of sports facilities by people with disabilities has risen from 9 per cent to 15 per cent by awareness campaigns and community events and the Council has invested in improvements for the riding centre for the Riding for Disabled Association. There are community outreach workers working with the Asian community, arranging women only fitness and swimming sessions. The Council is working effectively to engage all aspects of the community in activity to improve health.
- 128** The Council is proactively addressing health through activity based initiatives. For example, there are: 300 sport, physical activity and nutrition after school clubs; and GOALS (Getting our Active Lifestyles Started) family based referral scheme with 200 families already involved. The Council's campaign 'Active City' is encouraging activity to improve health.

Older people

- 129** Services for older people are improving, though progress is not consistent. The Council has recently set out a comprehensive approach to the needs and wishes of older people, but it has not yet taken this vision further, and the joint commissioning strategy concentrates on users of care services. The Council and its partners promote a wide range of activities, some of them innovative and many designed in consultation with older people themselves. However, these initiatives do not form part of a comprehensive programme of action, so it is difficult to evaluate their overall impact in improving older people's lives.
- 130** The Council has recently defined its strategic approach to services for older people in an excellent 'visioning document'. It is based on an extensive and thorough survey of what older people want. The vision goes beyond care services to address the needs of the active and well - for example financial security and equal access to job markets. At local level, all neighbourhood agreements contain priorities about increasing older residents' incomes and promoting independent living. As neighbourhood management develops, there is scope for greater concentration on older people's needs. However it is not clear if the visioning document will be developed into a comprehensive action plan with performance measures. Lack of clear targets detracts focus on actions to deliver.
- 131** The Council works effectively with a number of partners and providers to deliver services for older people. Age Concern Liverpool (first in the country to be set up, 80 years ago) is a prominent partner; it runs a purpose-built active age centre providing affordable health, educational, social and leisure activities such as computer training and keep-fit. The centre uses outreach workers and volunteers in community settings to extend its reach. Age Concern's good neighbour service is funded by the Council; its 500 volunteers help 3,000 older people to remain in their own homes. Partner working is improving service capacity.

- 132** The Council is promoting a range of 'active ageing' initiatives. Initiatives include a Handyperson scheme to deliver simple maintenance to owner occupiers over 50. Residents pay for materials and the Council for labour costs. The House Proud scheme organises home improvement loans for elderly and vulnerable residents, and home ownership advisors provide independent guidance. Older people have free access to leisure facilities to encourage exercise. These initiatives are contributing to improving the life of older people.
- 133** Adult social care now serves most people well and has promising prospects for improvement, reflecting greater collaborative working between the Council and PCT to support older people in their own homes. Consultation with users has also resulted in improvements. Older people are increasingly able to control the help they need through direct payments. The take up of direct payments has increased over the last three years and the scheme is popular with older people and their carers. Care assessments are faster and the efficiency of benefits payments has improved. The benefits service now works with the local Pension Service to increase the uptake of benefits; as a result, an additional £0.3 million in pension credits and £64,000 in housing benefit has been awarded to new customers.
- 134** The Council is focusing on joint working to deliver integrated services. The Council and PCT have established a joint equipment store and 'Life House' scheme for older people. Users can attend the centre, get advice and have their needs assessed. This joined-up service is giving improved coordinated services.
- 135** The Council has targeted activity and resources to improve Adult services. The focus resulted in improvement from one star to two stars and serving 'most' people well. The Council addressed recommendations arising from an inspection of services for older people, and improved support for people to purchase care services that meet their needs. However, progress has not been uniform. The number of people aged 65 and over helped to live at home declined slightly over the last three years, and more older people are moving into residential care (590 in 2006/07, against a target of 545). The Council is improving services for older people but this is not consistent in all areas.
- 136** The Council and its partners are effectively informing the public about their services. It maintains a dedicated website for over-50s, and staff and volunteers also visit people in their homes. Information and advocacy services are an important part of the package of support in 'active ageing' initiatives.
- 137** The Council has significantly improved consultation, but not yet made the transition to greater participation by older people in shaping all services. Following the extensive programme of consultation for the older people's visioning document, a 'legacy group' of about 60 older people has expressed an interest in being involved further; however the group is under-used, and the Council is thus missing an opportunity to involve older people in the wider provision of services.

- 138 The Council has effectively established a number of user groups to aid consultation. The main representational forum for broader issues affecting the community is the Senior Citizens' forum (the umbrella group for about 200 organisations), facilitated by Age Concern. It is part of Liverpool Community Network, the main voice of communities on the LSP and its subgroups. The Council offers a range of services under the heading 'Supported Living' which has been informed by one of the service user groups which has been running for a year. This has included consultation about direct payments guidance and procedures. Effective consultation has improved service design for older people.
- 139 The Council is putting in place support mechanisms for older people but these are not yet fully effective. The joint commissioning strategy with the PCT and joint director appointment serves as an implementation vehicle, with a strong focus on the use of care services, but this does not maximise the wider agenda. The Council appointed a councillor 'older people's champion', and one of the neighbourhood managers has thematic responsibility for older people, but neither role is well known to other staff or stakeholders. Clear leadership is developing but not all aspects are well known or supporting coordinated services.

Children and young people

- 140 Outcomes for children and young people in Liverpool are improving and many are now good. Good action is being taken to improve the health of children and young people and this is beginning to show impact, for example in increasing participation in physical activity and reducing the incidence of teenage pregnancy. The majority of children and young people are provided with a safe environment and outcomes for children and young people requiring safeguarding are good. Educational outcomes are improving rapidly and most are in line with or above those of statistical neighbours. Standards attained at GCSE are significantly improved and are close to the national average. Outcomes for looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good.
- 141 The overall management of services for children and young people is good. Effective professional leadership, a strong commitment from officers and members, and good partnership working are improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people. The ambitions of the council and its partners reflect the involvement from parents, children and key stakeholders, and are good. Partners have a strong track record of achieving on priorities; they have successfully improved educational outcomes for young people in the area. Services are currently representing adequate value for money. There are some good examples of the partnership dealing with areas of underperformance, and scrutiny arrangements are delivering some good outcomes. However, sustainability is hindered by the council-wide financial difficulties and the council's medium-term financial plan does not clearly identify longer term needs or how funding will be prioritised to services for children and young people after 2007/08. The capacity of the council and its partners to continue to deliver better outcomes is adequate overall.

- 142** The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Children's centres have dedicated oral health workers and provide ante-natal care, anti-smoking and breastfeeding support. Initiatives such as the Healthy Schools programme, School Sports Partnerships, Active City and free access to sports centres are promoting active and healthy lifestyles. There are good multi-agency projects providing flexible support for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties and substance and alcohol misuse problems. Partners have established specialist services to meet the health needs of vulnerable and minority ethnic groups. Health outcomes for looked after children are good. Health needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are generally well met, but there are long waiting times for Speech and Language Therapy services.
- 143** Arrangements to ensure the safety of children and young people are good. There is a strong multi-agency commitment to safeguarding children in the community, and good partnership working to prevent involvement in anti-social behaviour, violent crime and gangs. The LSCB is effective, with strong commitment from a wide range of partner agencies. It is currently addressing the fact that no privately fostered children have been identified and are known to social care services. Thresholds for early intervention and referral to social care are clearly defined to enable agencies to meet different levels of need. Extensive training has been provided on the Common Assessment Framework but not all agencies are fully engaged in its implementation. A relatively high proportion of looked after children are fostered by relatives and friends. They are regularly monitored through statutory visits and reviews, but outcomes for these children are generally not as good as they are for children placed with foster carers or in residential homes.
- 144** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. Intensive challenge and support has led to rapid improvement at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*–C grades at GCSE increased in 2007 to 61.3 per cent, which brings the percentage close to the national average. The majority of black and ethnic groups make satisfactory progress, although Somali and Yemeni groups have lower than average attainment. Targeted support to help new arrivals develop literacy and language skills has been put in place. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. Looked after children's attainment fluctuates year on year but improved in 2007. Targeted support to reduce absence in secondary schools is showing some impact. However, authorised absence overall remains high compared to national averages, and is particularly high for looked after children and those with statements of special educational need in mainstream schools.

- 145** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. There is an innovative and strategic approach to young people's participation and to listening to young people's views. Young people contribute to staff recruitment and there are examples of services developing in response to their views. There are good opportunities for looked after children to contribute to decisions being made about their lives but procedures to record their participation in reviews do not accurately capture their involvement. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good opportunities to contribute within their schools, through the youth service, the Youth Parliament and through consultation meetings. Partners have a unified and strategic approach to tackling anti-social behaviour and to prevent young people becoming involved in violent crime and gangs. However, there is a lack of involvement in consultation and participation by children and young people engaged by the youth offending service.
- 146** The impact of all local services in improving the economic well-being of children and young people is good. The 14–19 Learning Partnership provides effective strategic leadership and direction for the development of 14–19 provision. Good collaborative working between schools and with the college underpins the ongoing improvement in achievement at ages 14 to 16. School consortia are well established and are improving the quality of 16 to 19 education and training. Post-16 provision has broadened the curriculum, increased the mobility of young people, and raised rates of recruitment, retention and attainment. Although the number of young people not in education, employment or training has fallen and is reducing at a faster rate than nationally, it is still higher than the national figure, and the numbers who leave at age 17 and 18 are high.

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 Liverpool City Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 15 October to 26 October 2007.
- 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.