

Report to: **Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **21 November 2007**
By: **Chief Executive**
Title of report: **Corporate Assessment (CA) – Areas for Improvement**
Purpose of report: **To discuss the areas for improvement identified in the Corporate Assessment Report.**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 1. note that actions to address outstanding areas for improvement will be developed and monitored through the Reconciling Policy and Resources Process (RPR); and**
- 2. note the positive comments within the CA about the scrutiny function contained in Appendix 3.**

1 Supporting information

1.1 The Audit Commission published the Council's CA report on 16 October. The Council has been judged as '*...performing well, consistently above minimum standards*' by the Audit Commission and awarded a '3' (good) for each judgement. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix 2.

2 Areas For improvement

2.1 The following key areas for improvement have been identified for the Council:

Extract:

- needs to increase its efforts to persuade the waste collection authorities to agree a county-wide waste strategy. This strategy needs to ensure a coordinated approach that improves its currently low rate of recycling, maximises the re-use of materials, and minimises the transport and other costs of alternative methods of disposing of waste;
- should give leadership to all stakeholders to embrace the wider environmental agendas, including sustainability;
- should look again at delivering an improved transport infrastructure, including energising partners to look for innovative solutions to rural transport matters;
- should use the opportunity of developing the new community strategy to ensure that feedback mechanisms to those consulted are improved; and
- should improve its approach to diversity by improving its understanding of needs by thorough data gathering and analysis, including the growing migrant communities.

2.2 In addition in the report there is commentary on the future development of several areas. This will be used to inform business planning for 2008/09 and beyond.

2.3 The CA report acknowledged the self awareness that the Authority has of its strengths and weaknesses and as a consequence actions are already in hand or planned for these areas (see table attached at appendix 1).

2.4 Actions for those outstanding areas will be identified through the RPR process and monitored through the normal Council Plan process. Given that it is proposed to address all these areas through the RPR process, there is no recommendation, at this stage, to identify a best value review.

3. Comments on Scrutiny

3.1 The Scrutiny function in the Council has received positive praise from the Audit Commission inspection team and appendix 3 contains the detailed comments on different aspects of scrutiny.

CHERYL MILLER
Chief Executive

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Local Members: All

Background Documents
None

Areas for improvement	Work in progress to address this area	Department
The Council needs to increase its efforts to persuade the waste collection authorities to agree a county-wide waste strategy. This strategy needs to ensure a coordinated approach that improves its currently low rate of recycling, maximises the re-use of materials, and minimises the transport and other costs of alternative methods of disposing of waste.	The Municipal Waste Management Strategy, now completed, provides a framework for joint working. In addition further work through the joint waste managers group (all local authorities) will provide a mechanism to develop a shared understanding to facilitate a county wide waste strategy. The resolution of the Waste Recycling Credits issue remains significant.	Transport and Environment
The Council should give leadership to all stakeholders to embrace the wider environmental agendas, including sustainability.	A new policy steer has been proposed on climate change for the coming year and a climate change strategy will be developed. In addition a separate policy steer for an environmental strategy has also been proposed. This will provide a steer on the wider environmental agenda, including sustainability. Work with partners is being integrated into the Sustainable Communities Strategy.	Transport and Environment leading work across all departments
The Council should look again at delivering an improved transport infrastructure, including energising partners to look for innovative solutions to rural transport matters.	The passenger transport review provides an opportunity to develop improved transport infrastructure, including mechanisms for improving rural transport.	Transport and Environment
The Council should use the opportunity of developing the new community strategy to ensure that feedback mechanisms to those consulted are improved.	The preparation for the development of the Community Strategy included an event for East Sussex Assembly members (80 participants). Feedback from the day was posted on the East Sussex Strategic Partnership (ESSP) website. All participants will receive the consultation draft of the strategy in mid November. On the broader issue a new strengthened consultation strategy and action plan has been put in place and will, amongst other improvements, strengthen feedback mechanisms.	Policy and Communications

Areas for improvement	Work in progress to address this area	Department
The Council should improve its approach to diversity by improving its understanding of needs by thorough data gathering and analysis, including the growing migrant communities.	Work is progressing through the Sussex Improvement Partnership and ESSP joint approach to understanding our communities and their needs.	Policy and Communications

Corporate Assessment Report

October 2007



Corporate Assessment

East Sussex County Council

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Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement

Considered against the shared priorities of:

- sustainable communities and transport;
- safer and stronger communities;
- healthier communities;
- older people; and
- children and young people.

- 3 Corporate assessments are normally aligned with a joint area review of services for children and young people (JAR). In practice this means that the Council's achievements in relation to children and young people are assessed using the evidence provided from the JAR. In addition, examples of outcomes and activity, which are relevant to the other themes and which are identified through the JAR, are considered within the corporate assessment.

- 4 The JAR covers all services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes. The separate JAR report covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that such services work together to improve outcomes. The description and judgement in respect of children and young people in this report is summarised from the JAR report.

Executive summary

- 5 East Sussex County Council is performing well, consistently above minimum requirements. It meets well with the challenges it is facing. Regional and national partners recognise it as providing strong corporate and community leadership, with an outward looking and visible approach to fulfilling its shared vision for the community. The vision for the county is clear and ambitious, and is shared with statutory and voluntary sector partners and residents, although some stakeholders would like to see transport as an increased priority. The vision reflects national agendas and most local needs, and is supported by staff.
- 6 Partners appreciate the ability of the Chief Executive and managers as well as the drive of the current political leadership. The Council and partners have a shared understanding of the complexities of a county that has - compared to the rest of England - an older population, less working people and more people with disabilities; areas of relative wealth as well as pockets of severe deprivation, especially around the coastal urban areas; no motorways, the least miles of dual carriageway of all counties, and a rail infrastructure that is limited. At the core of ambition is improving the poorly performing local economy.
- 7 The Council has given direction to the East Sussex Strategic Partnership (ESSP), to clarify and align its vision, resources and priorities. The community strategy has been produced through extensive community consultation, setting out clear priorities to be addressed and the actions required of partners. The community strategy, the Local Area Agreement (LAA) delivery plans and the Council Plan are fully aligned. The Council has moved resources from lower priorities to boost the corporate and community strategy priorities.
- 8 Council ambitions are supported well by internal systems. Strong and inclusive consultation enhances the Council's user focus, especially with groups at risk of disadvantage such as travellers and older people. The Reconciling Policy and Resources (RPR) integrated procedure ensures that the use of resources is well-linked to priorities. Service planning is mostly effective, and performance management resulting in corrective intervention is evident. Councillors are generally well informed and are supported by able and knowledgeable officers. Scrutiny is well developed and supports policy making. Value for money is good within a restricted budget. There is a range of appropriate corporate HR policies including staff recruitment, retention, sickness absence, and training and development. Strategic workforce planning is evident, and property and ICT management is strong. However, some stakeholders feel that consultation feedback mechanisms are not always effective in explaining to them what has happened as a result of their involvement.
- 9 The Council is facing up to difficult decisions to improve services. An example is the closure of residential homes to secure investment in new types of community-based care patterns. It is focusing on three priority areas for improvement, moving resources from other areas to support adult social care, waste management and school attainment.

- 10 The Council and partners deliver generally high quality services for residents. Activities to regenerate the economy include developing the port at Newhaven, the University Centre Hastings, a county-wide broadband initiative, support for small businesses, and a long-term approach to improving the local skills base. The shortage of landfill is being met by joint work with Brighton & Hove City Council to provide an energy-from-waste facility and more recycling facilities. However, the lack of an agreed county waste strategy and the district councils' different approaches to waste collection result in generally low levels of recycling. Transport improvements are also slow and the condition of local roads is poor.
- 11 The Council and partners focus well on crime and safety hotspots. East Sussex is a comparatively low crime area although there are some crime hotspots, and the Council and partners are targeting where intervention will do most good. Work on domestic violence in Hastings has significantly reduced repeat offences and the introduction of 'No cold calling' zones to help combat doorstep crime is making a difference to how people feel about their area. Initiatives to reduce drug harm are increasing the numbers of people entering and staying on support programmes. Work with the fire service is reducing fires from fly-tipping and abandoned cars.
- 12 The Council and partners are improving the health of the county's communities. Targets for smoking cessation in the two worst areas have been exceeded and teenage pregnancies have reduced in all districts apart from Rother (where rates remain below the national and East Sussex average), although Hastings and Eastbourne are still above the regional average. Initiatives to improve health include projects with nine schools in Eastbourne and Hailsham, healthy school dinners, walking/cycling schemes, and the joint director of public health role to propose a county health strategy and agree a programme of work.
- 13 There is a positive approach to older people. With its partners it is responding appropriately to the increasingly ageing population by identifying adult social care as a priority in the Council Plan and the LAA delivery plan. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) inspection in 2006 found a good range of services but deficiencies in services for older people with mental health needs, early onset dementia and extra care housing options. A comprehensive strategy for older people is under development that encompasses wellbeing as well as care. The Council's partnership working with health and the voluntary sector has reduced delayed discharges by over 50 per cent, and work with the Department for Work and Pensions has increased the take-up of benefits by £4 million.
- 14 Outcomes for children and young people are good. Those most in need of protection receive prompt support. Looked after children have good outcomes, improving particularly rapidly in secondary education. Educational outcomes are adequate overall and improving in many aspects, but standards are not good enough. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do well.

- 15 The Council's approach to diversity is adequate. The Council appreciates the diversity of the county's population and engages some Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) citizens, including BME older people, appropriately. It works particularly well with travellers' groups, including increasing access by that group to services through outreach work. On the other hand, the Council has yet to understand the needs of the growing number of Eastern European migrant workers, highlighting an under-developed data gathering and analysis function on diversity issues.

Areas for improvement

- 16 The Council needs to increase its efforts to persuade the waste collection authorities to agree a county-wide waste strategy. This strategy needs to ensure a coordinated approach that improves its currently low rate of recycling, maximises the re-use of materials, and minimises the transport and other costs of alternative methods of disposing of waste.
- 17 The Council should give leadership to all stakeholders to embrace the wider environmental agendas, including sustainability.
- 18 The Council should look again at delivering an improved transport infrastructure, including energising partners to look for innovative solutions to rural transport matters.
- 19 The Council should use the opportunity of developing the new community strategy to ensure that feedback mechanisms to those consulted are improved.
- 20 The Council should improve its approach to diversity by improving its understanding of needs by thorough data gathering and analysis, including the growing migrant communities.

Summary of assessment scores

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

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

Scores on five themes	Overall corporate assessment score
Two or more themes with a score of 4 None less than 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

- 21 East Sussex is a county on the South Eastern coast of England. It has a population of around 500,000, and includes the districts of Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Rother and Wealden. Sixty-four per cent of the county is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is a county of contrasts, including the natural beauty of the South Downs, wetland areas, rural villages, historic market towns and coastal resorts. The black and minority ethnic (BME) population accounts for 3.9 per cent of the total population. There is a growing Eastern European migrant worker population.
- 22 The county contains types and levels of disadvantage unusual for the South East of England. There are pockets of severe deprivation, particularly in the coastal towns. Of 327 localities in East Sussex, 13 fall in the 10 per cent most deprived in England (12 in Hastings and one in Eastbourne). One-third of these areas in Hastings are in the most deprived 20 per cent in England, and the town has the highest proportion of deprived areas of any part of the South East. This deprivation leads to health and social problems - variable life expectancy, high teenage pregnancy rates, low skills levels, localised higher crime levels and higher unemployment. The unemployment rate at December 2006 was 2.1 per cent compared to the 2.5 per cent national average and a 1.6 per cent regional average. Twenty-seven wards across the County have unemployment levels equalling or exceeding the national average.
- 23 There are only 18.9 miles of dual carriageway in the county (the least of all counties), no motorways and limited rail infrastructure.
- 24 The county has, compared to the rest of England, an older population, less working people and more people with disabilities. Twenty-six per cent of residents are over pensionable age, the second highest level of any area in the country, with the highest levels of the 'very elderly' of any county in England (by all three categories over 75, over 85 and over 90 years old). Only 55.6 per cent of residents are of working age (compared to the national average 62 per cent, and the regional average of 61.4 per cent); and the county has a lower population of under 16s (18.3 per cent) than the national average (19.3 per cent). East Sussex has a high proportion of people with disabilities (19.8 per cent of working age residents, compared to 16.4 per cent regionally and 18.6 per cent nationally).
- 25 The Council is engaged in regenerating the areas of Hastings, Eastbourne and Newhaven to improve the quality of life and economic prospects of the residents of East Sussex. This activity is addressed across all services and focuses on building a knowledge-based economy. The earnings gap between East Sussex and the rest of the region has closed, improving from 22 per cent in 2002 to 17 per cent in 2006. With house prices static and earnings having increased, the local earning/house price ratio has fallen from 8.2 in 2005 to 7.5 in 2006 - but is still higher than the national ratio of 5.6.

- 26 The proportion of those qualified to degree level and above has increased from 23 per cent in 2003/04 to 28 per cent at the end of December 2005; and the number of school leavers achieving level 2 qualifications (at least five A-C grades at GCSE or equivalent) has improved each year, from 51.2 per cent in 2002 to 55.4 per cent in 2006.
- 27 Crime levels in East Sussex overall are relatively low compared to national averages, and there has been a reduction of 5.7 per cent since 2004/05 in the number of all recorded crimes in East Sussex. There are pockets of relatively high crime in Hastings and some wards in Eastbourne. Despite the overall low level of crime, the fear of crime remains a key concern to the county's residents.

The Council

- 28 In 2002, the Council was assessed as 'Good' in the first comprehensive performance assessment. It is currently rated by the Audit Commission as a three-star council. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) rates the Council's quality of services for children and young people as 'good' with 'excellent prospects' for future improvement. CSCI scored adult social services as 'serving some people well' with 'uncertain prospects' for improvement.
- 29 Since May 2005 the political balance of the 49 Councillors in 44 divisions is: 29 Conservative; 13 Liberal Democrat; 5 Labour; and 2 Independent. The nine Cabinet Councillors each have a specific portfolio. Cross-party Scrutiny Committees are chaired according to the political balance.
- 30 The East Sussex Strategic Partnership (ESSP), chaired by one of the voluntary sector representatives, is responsible for delivering the County's Community Strategy, *Pride of Place*. Partners were responsible for delivering specific targets and received a share of the rewards from the first Public Service Agreement (PSA).
- 31 Councillors are supported by the Chief Officers' Management Team that comprises the Chief Executive and six Directors.
- 32 The Council is the largest single employer in East Sussex. It employs 15,813 staff (full time equivalent -10,700).
- 33 The Council receives a 'floor-level' grant from the government in the current financial year of £361 per head (the lowest per capita grant in the country) and currently spends £926.23 per head of population on services, compared to the county council average of £869.27. Council tax for a band D property in East Sussex in the current financial year at £1,121, which is higher than the South East counties and the all counties average. To restrict council tax increases to local people, the Council in 2006 agreed a four-year budget plan and a rise in council tax for 2006/07 of 4.7 per cent, followed by a steady reduction in the rise for the following three years of 4.3 per cent, 3.9 per cent and 3.5 per cent. The Council has increased its spend through a range of efficiency savings, as explained further in Prioritisation below. The current revenue budget is £294.5 million and the capital programme is £76.9 million.

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

Ambition

- 34 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. The Council and partners have a good understanding of the needs of the East Sussex communities and clear, overarching and challenging shared ambitions. There are close links between the community strategy *Pride of Place*, the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Council Plan. Partners state that councillors and staff give strong community leadership underpinned by innovative and extensive community engagement mechanisms.
- 35 The vision for the area is aligned well with that of all partners, and supported by stretching targets. The context and challenges of East Sussex are well-reflected in the ambitions of the Council Plan 2007/08. They include the short-term need to afford the rising costs of adult social care and waste management, but also the medium-term need to improve educational attainment and increase adult skills, as well as the long-term desire to have an aged-balanced population by encouraging younger people to come to live and work in the county. These ambitions are supported by stretching targets which are aligned with the ambitions within the LAA and community strategy, and all agreed by partners. Examples of stretching targets include reducing reoffending by young people by just under 4 per cent by 2008/09 and reducing death rates by heart disease amongst adults by 5 per cent each year. The Council recognises the need to improve its approach to sustainability, prompting a review of the community strategy that will have sustainability at its core. Councillors and staff are also active regionally and nationally to influence agencies such as the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) and SEEDA (South East England Development Agency), which has secured funds for a range of regeneration projects. The alignment of plans and co-ordinated efforts strengthen the partnership's focus on the shared set of stretching targets.
- 36 Council aims are based on consultation with local people and reflect well the national and local government shared priorities. They complement the 'Promise' set out in the Council Plan:
- 'We will be an efficient, customer focused, accountable authority working with partners and local communities to:*
- make a positive difference to local people's lives;*
- create a prosperous and safe County; and*
- provide affordable, high quality services at lowest possible council tax.'*

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37 The Council Plan has seven theme aims that are underpinned by SMART¹ actions and targets:

- strategic management and economic development;
- corporate resources planning and management;
- community services;
- children's and adult services;
- children's services;
- adult social care; and
- transport and environment;

and these incorporate the LAA targets where applicable. At the core of the ambition of the Council and its partners is improving the poorly performing local economy. This ensures that the Council reflects and focuses on an overarching theme, as well as the service delivery targets that are important for the county's communities.

38 Ambitions are based on a thorough understanding of the needs of the county by the Council and partners. Data and analysis of local need is accessed through a range of partnership-based resources to inform strategic and operational planning and delivery. These include East Sussex in Figures (ESiF), a web-based resource supported in partnership with the borough and district councils; the East Sussex Economic Study; and CADDIE (Crime and Disorder Data Information Exchange) which allows the emergency services, local authorities and community organisations to share information to prevent and reduce the fear of crime and disorder. All these resources are used to enable funding and intervention to be appropriately targeted. This intelligence means that the Council's and partners' aims focus on the issues that research indicates are the most important to tackle.

39 Ambitions for improving the poorly performing economy are progressive and clear. Regeneration therefore includes a wide range of features to deal with the needs of people (discussed below) as well as improving the built environment. The Council focused initially on Hastings and Bexhill including the pivotal Link road project and on raising educational standards. Its current focus includes substantial changes to the economy of the port of Newhaven through the Newhaven Masterplan and the building of the Central Rail Corridor (Newhaven, Lewes, Uckfield, and London). The next phase of economic improvement focuses on the Eastbourne - Hailsham area, including creating a blueprint to guide the social, economic and physical development of the area to deliver regeneration and create new sustainable communities.

¹ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed

- 40 The Council is ambitious to focus on improving school attainment and developing skills-led productivity in the county to attract new business, particularly in the areas of regeneration. The adult skills partnership, which includes the Learning and Skills Council, East Sussex Economic Partnership (ESEP) and local providers have set up establishments like the University Centre Hastings and the Skills College in Peacehaven to provide jobs for local young people and to attract other young people to locate to the area, thus adjusting the demographic imbalance. Ambitions are wide-ranging and are based on meeting the social, educational as well as economic needs of the population.
- 41 The Council listens to and acts on the results of consultation. Consultation methods include collecting communities' views through councillors, staff, partners, local businesses; the 1,600 person Residents' Panel; and age and community specific groups including Children's Services' BME panels, older people's forums including specific BME sections, the East Sussex Traveller Forum, and the youth cabinet. The top three issues affecting young people – bullying, safety and exams, are now being taken forward by the Youth Cabinet as their key campaign issues for this coming year. In addition, consultation of the shape of the future of adult social care has led to a focus on new types of community-based care patterns. Consultation has identified a clear view from some stakeholders that roads should be improved, but the Council has not yet been able to convince them of the practical and especially the cost implications of doing so. The Council and partners therefore ensure that they work well with stakeholders to drive forward their ambitions for the East Sussex communities though not all community aspirations are set out in firm plans.

Prioritisation

- 42 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. The Council has used its thorough understanding of local demographic trends and national priorities to set local priorities. It is clear what needs to happen to deliver the overall vision and aims set out in its medium-term business plan (the Council Plan) and it has set SMART targets for its three top priorities, working with LAA partners to ensure a close link between these plans. The Council uses the Reconciling Policy and Resources (RPR) mechanism to link priorities and spend, giving assurance that scarce resources are deployed where they can do most good to deliver ambitions. As a result, the Council is able to design, deliver and evaluate its services and partnership work with the priorities as the key driver.
- 43 The Council understands from its widespread consultation processes what matters to local people. It has made a particular effort to listen to the needs of hard to reach groups through a range of means such as including BME communities in the citizen's panel, conducting regular budget consultations with voluntary and community groups including travellers, and these consultations have affirmed the priorities. This has led to three short-to-medium term top priorities for action over the next three years, as well as a longer-term ambition and focus.

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44 The short-to-medium term priorities are:

- adult social care;
- waste management; and
- school attainment.

As a result of thorough consultation, the Council can be confident that its allocation of resources to these priorities is properly targeted to the area's needs.

45 The Council and partners are also able to articulate SMART actions for longer-term ambitions. The ambition for the county as a whole, derived from an assessment of local needs, was developed with and is shared by partners. *Pride of Place* sets out a 15-year vision for:

'a sustainable county with an improving quality of life, where everyone can prosper, where individuals can participate fully in the lives of their communities, where those in need are supported and where individuals and organisations play their part in protecting our distinct environment for the benefit of present and future generations'.

The key focus is on improving the poorly performing local economy. Long-term actions are already underway to regenerate the economy by tackling a disparate range of issues such as raising skills levels and tackling health inequalities, as well as regenerating and adding to the built environment. The Council Plan and LAA (and previously the PSA) are the vehicles through which the Council and partners are delivering their challenging partnership-based ambitions for East Sussex. As a result, the Council and partners are dealing with embedded problems in a planned and sustained long-term manner.

46 The RPR mechanism successfully turns priorities into SMART action plans. The RPR has all-party support and all councillors are fully engaged in it. RPR links policy direction to individual work plans, the medium term financial plan, the Council Plan, three-year portfolio and departmental plans and individual team/personal targets. RPR is initiated each year with a 'State of the County' report from the Cabinet to a County Council meeting which considers the national and local context, along with financial, risk management, efficiency, performance and other planning issues. It is an iterative process of discussion, challenge and close examination of policy and budget issues. Scrutiny Committees examine critically the policy steers and assess their compatibility to the more detailed proposals emerging from the process via specially established boards. Examples include the review of funding and procurement, LINKS scheme and the community leadership role of councillors within the voluntary and community sectors. RPR is therefore a robust strategy to link priorities with spend.

- 47 There is also widespread if not total agreement on non-priorities. Managers and staff show a shared understanding of what are not priorities. The priority a service has determines its funding level, with differential growth and savings targets set across and within portfolios. For example, while adult social care will receive over 5 per cent more cash in each of the next three years, central departments will have a cash freeze and spending in some service areas such as highways maintenance has not kept pace with inflation. Choices are made both between and within portfolios and budgets to support priorities. This does not always yield results in line with priorities. For example, in the budget year 2005/06, £350,000 was withdrawn from carer's support, a key mechanism within adult social care, a decision that was subsequently reversed in the following year; but this is the only variance in a scheme that otherwise delivers spend against priorities. Some residents and businesses are, however, not clear why transport is a relative non-priority, given the poor road infrastructure. As a result, not all stakeholders understand fully what are non-priorities and why.
- 48 RPR produces efficiency savings that are used to boost funding for higher priorities. In the last five years, it has produced savings of about £20 million each year, mainly through efficiency savings, that have been redirected to priorities. As part of the four-year budget plan, a £10 million *Invest to Save* fund was agreed. Access to this fund is agreed only if a business case shows the likelihood that the investment will lead to yet further savings. So far £4 million has been devoted to delivering the Business Transformation project in adult social care, one of the Council's top immediate priorities. Since 2002, the Council has increased spending on adult social care, a top priority for improvement, by over 35 per cent; increased the waste budget in line with a new integrated waste disposal Private Finance Initiative (PFI) by 65 per cent while also making efficiency savings within the contract; increased capital investment in key areas; improved the area's relative education performance; and kept council tax increases below the average for South East counties. RPR achieves its objectives well.

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

Capacity

- 49 The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. There is a strong approach to workforce planning and a clear budgetary framework within which it works. The strength and clarity of leadership from senior management ensures that there is transparent decision-making and accountability to support service delivery and improvement. Also there is strong partnership working in place that builds on the success in attracting external funding to pursue new initiatives. Internal challenge through the scrutiny function is well established. Both staff and councillors are clear about their roles and responsibilities, operating within an appropriate ethical framework. The shared services initiatives require further development. There is a strong workforce and over the past two years there has been a marked improvement in sickness absence levels. Some front line staff feel though that they could not make a contribution to innovation and that hinders capacity. Overall, capacity is aligned well to deliver the Council's ambitions.
- 50 The Council shows strong leadership, internally and externally. There is a clear and well-structured constitution that sets out the delegation arrangements, ensuring that staff and councillors understand their respective roles and responsibilities. A continuous development programme for councillors keeps them abreast of current issues and trends, and this programme has received the Charter for Member Development from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). Also, good leadership has been shown when engaging with the leaders of the districts and boroughs. The establishment of the Leaders' Forum is credited with prompting the exploration of the potential for shared services. This is a sound foundation for effective decision making.
- 51 A robust financial management regime is in place. The Council has a balanced budget and adequate reserves which are bolstered from the success in attracting external funding. The Council's policy steers set the framework for the RPR process which ensures that performance and financial management support their delivery. This process provides staff with a clear basis upon which to plan for service delivery in the future.

- 52 The Council operates a stringent budget policy that provides a strong focus on achieving value for money. Council tax increases have been pegged over the next four years to minimise the burden on residents. There is a focus on achieving savings which, as stated above, have amounted to about £90 million over the last five years. Examples include cash freezes on central departments and lower increases for services like highways maintenance. The PFI waste contract is expected to exceed the anticipated savings of £300 million over the 25-year period. A well-structured risk and project management regime supports this drive for effective working. These approaches ensure that resources are used effectively to deliver the identified aims and that future spending is well-planned.
- 53 Staff capacity to deliver the priorities is good. Workforce planning is developing to ensure that the right skills are available to the Council and partners. The workforce is representative of the county's population. Compared to other councils, the Council employs above average ratios of top earners who are women or from a BME background. The percentage of staff with disabilities or from a BME background is also above average. Staff are supported by a well-structured career and personal development programme, which is set out in the Leadership and Management Development Strategy. They are able and committed, although the opportunity to contribute to innovation for frontline staff is not as well-structured as for more senior staff. Staff sickness has been a factor that has inhibited capacity to deliver the Council's ambitions. In response the Council has put in place an active attendance management structure that is supported by a range of wellbeing initiatives. Overall this approach has been successful, with sickness absence improving from 9.23 days per employee in 2002/03 to 8.01 days in 2006/07. Improving staff capacity is providing the basis for the Council to commit itself to new initiatives to deliver its priorities.
- 54 Partnership working is effective. There are many partnerships in place that are delivering enhanced services for the community such as the regeneration and community safety initiatives. A notable example is the Sussex Improvement Partnership that includes all councils in West and East Sussex, including Brighton & Hove City Council. This is focused on improving the services delivered across the whole of Sussex and includes identifying opportunities for shared services. While there is enthusiasm for developing such an approach and many examples of shared arrangements, the Council has yet to enter into significant new financial arrangements for service delivery beyond those areas where it is already working in partnership such as the waste PFI. Support for the voluntary sector is being provided, including a scheme to encourage volunteering that is already showing significant increases in volunteering. The Council is enhancing the capacity of the voluntary sector through provision of infrastructure support and a Community Partnership Fund of just under £800,000. This means that the Council and partners are in a stronger position to achieve their aims.

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

- 55** ICT is highly effective. The East Sussex gateway uses cabling throughout the county, including to 12 one-stop shops, kiosks in libraries, district council venues, village shops and post offices. The use of e-forms is being enhanced well to broaden the accessibility of the Council services. A new on-line application system for primary and secondary school admissions was introduced in 2006/07 which has resulted in more than trebling the total submissions, doubling the total downloads and submissions between 2005/06 and 2006/07. Effective ICT is making it easier for the community to access processes and information.
- 56** The Council makes good use of external funding to help deliver priorities. Working through SEEDA, it has attracted £300 million funding from eight separate sources for the regeneration work at Hastings, and Area Investment Frameworks are in place covering the whole of the county to attract regeneration related funding. The Council is also host to a bidding database which is available to help other partners to identify suitable external funding. The scheme uses a whole-life costing approach including preparing a succession plan for when funding stops, an example being the 'Down Your Way' scheme to improve the co-ordination of community transport booking. Other successes include £3.2 million for extra care housing and £4 million for an Enterprise Gateway on Denton Island. External funding enhances the ability to provide a range of services needed to meet the county's priorities.

Performance management

- 57** The Council is performing well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. Performance management systems are clear, well co-ordinated and are an integral part of the Council's business planning processes. The role of scrutiny in performance management is well developed. Performance management is also working well in all the key partnerships involving the Council. The Council uses information proactively to drive improvement. The Council learns from other authorities and external agencies to improve further its performance though strategies do not always feed consistently into service plans.
- 58** The Council's performance reporting and action planning framework works well. Chief Officers and Cabinet consider performance against the Council Plan, focusing on achievements and areas where performance is giving cause for concern on a quarterly basis. The report explains any issues that will prevent a target being achieved as originally envisaged. The Council uses exception reporting, in which targets are assessed using a 'traffic light' system, to highlight action needed for targets assessed as 'red' or 'amber'. The monitoring reports are debated at Cabinet and County Council, and available to the public via the Council's website. Where performance is not meeting targets set out in the Council Plan, actions to address barriers to improving performance are agreed and carried out. The Council has provided simple and clear guides on performance management and improvement for officers and councillors. As a result, the performance framework enables variances from target to be spotted and addressed.

- 59 There is a strong performance-driven culture within the Council. There is a clear understanding of the need to set informed stretch targets and to use challenge to drive improved service performance. Commitment to performance management among both councillors and senior officers is high. The role of scrutiny in driving service improvement is strong, for example, in the revised contract for delivering school improvement. Also, when poor performance was identified on delayed transfers of care (DTC), the Council with its health partners redesigned services and put new processes in place. As a result, there have been significant improvements in performance, with delayed transfers of care reduced by over 50 per cent in the last 12 months. Similarly, the Council intervened to tackle under-performance in maths and science at Key Stage 3 (KS3) and reduced the levels of fixed term exclusions in Hastings. As a result, performance management allows the Council to keep its plans on track.
- 60 The performance management of partnership arrangements work well. There is a mix of established and developing performance management and monitoring arrangements with key partners. Performance management systems are in place for the LSP, and the performance and governance arrangements with partners jointly providing services to children and young people are developing well. Performance is monitored well through the Children and Young People's Plan (C&YPP) and there are effective mechanisms for sharing performance information with partners at a strategic level. This enables the Council and partners to ensure that priorities are being implemented and outcomes are being met.
- 61 The quality of strategic plans is generally good. The community strategy contains SMART targets, action plans and monitoring processes; and there are strong planning frameworks in place for the corporate plan and the community strategy. Connections between service planning, financial management and corporate planning are integrated. The Council has strong quality control checks on service/business planning within departments, to ensure consistency in content and standard. Business planning processes are well-established in the directorates, but inconsistencies remain with some relevant policies and strategies not always feeding into the service plans, such as the looked-after children's offending strategy. Most plans therefore follow the strong planning frameworks.
- 62 Individual performance appraisal is effective. Officers are clear about what is expected of them and what the key priorities of the Council are. The Council has a comprehensive appraisal process in place, with both officers and councillors being appraised. Directors and portfolio-holders meet weekly to discuss and account for service performance. Training and development opportunities are widespread, and driven by performance management needs. The Council has learnt from appraisals that front-line staff wish to contribute to 'innovations groups' to discuss service improvements and this is being considered. The Council uses and learns from the outputs of appraisals.

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

- 63** The Council listens to and acts on customer feedback to improve services. Customer service standards are in place and the Council uses complaints information to develop services. For example, the Council revised its library stock policy following feedback from BME groups, and changes were made to the focus of drug and alcohol projects following feedback from the youth cabinet. Although the corporate system for collating and monitoring complaints is under development, departments do review complaints and take action. For example, the Council produced a multi-agency traveller's strategy, following a number of complaints from the community. This has resulted in improved access to health and welfare services for travellers (over 150 contacts made) and has led to an award of over £1.2 million by government to create a new transit site and £0.5 million to refurbish one of the permanent sites. The Council is making use of customer feedback to inform service delivery and improvement.
- 64** The Council has secured improvements through comparisons with other authorities and external challenge. For example, for older people it has improved services through its work with beacon councils as well as dealing effectively with the criticisms made in the CSCI report. It has also strengthened its approach to customer care following its visits to Marks & Spencers Ltd by learning how to improve customer service. Learning is shared across the organisation through cross-directorate forums. Benchmarking is used consistently to understand its performance against other local authorities, and to explore key success factors and barriers to progress. Examples include benchmarking carried out on targeting resources in trading standards, assessing the comparative numbers of exclusions and improving library provision. An IDeA peer review in 2006 led to a number of structural and cultural changes such as the introduction of new partnership guidelines and an enhanced procurement strategy. The Council learns from others and takes action to improve services.

What has been achieved?

- 65** Overall, the Council is performing well, consistently above minimum requirements. It has achieved well both against its own priorities and also against the national shared priorities. It has achieved a range of improvements to the economic infrastructure of the county, both in terms of the built environment as well as improving the skills of the community - the key ambition for the Council and partners. It has also improved school attainment, including for vulnerable children. Crime in the county is already low, with East Sussex performing better than the national average in five of six crime types (worse than average in violent crime). On improving health, life expectancy is higher than the national average, teenage pregnancy rates are generally reducing but the number of road injuries and deaths remains high. Older people are generally well-served through the range of services available, more people being able to live at home, and more benefits being claimed. The transport network remains under-developed, however, and there is no agreed waste strategy among all the local authorities in the county, with low levels of recycling as one effect. As a result, residents see improvements in many but not all services.
- 66** The Council's achievement against its current corporate plan priorities is strong.
- On the core priority of improving the poor performing local economy, improvements in economic regeneration to increase community prosperity are evident throughout the county. Inward investment is significant; towns such as Newhaven have experienced physical improvements; wage rates have improved; and the development of the University Centre Hastings provides opportunities for young people to stay in the county and receive a higher education, as well as generating new employment.
 - On adult social care, in 2006 an inspection of social care services for older people found that the Council was serving some people well, though with uncertain prospects for improvement. CSCI raised concerns including about a reduction in services for carers (a service for which the funding had just been cut but was replaced again this year). The inspection did, however, acknowledge that the Council had a clear vision to achieve improvement and effective leadership. Elsewhere, services to older people are improving, such as increasing benefits payments and helping older people to live longer at home.
 - On waste management, the Council is slowing the growth in waste production. A shared sustainable waste management system with Brighton & Hove City Council has enabled the councils to achieve their combined recycling and composting targets this year of 27 per cent, improved from 22 per cent in 2003/04. Also, a long term sustainable approach is planned through the energy recovery facility.
 - On school attainment, there is an improving pattern, such as the proportion of young people gaining GCSEs, percentage of absences in primary and secondary schools, and the speed of special needs assessments completed.

- 67 In 2006/07, 78.9 per cent of actions and targets in the Council Plan were achieved or on track. Audited performance data for 2005/06 shows that 77.8 per cent of performance indicators have met or exceeded targets and 19 per cent compare favourably with best performance nationally. Also, 57 per cent of indicators have improved which is within the average range for all councils. As a result, residents see generally good performance against local and national priorities.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 68 The Council is making a strong contribution to the economic vitality of the area and is improving the quality of the environment. However, improvements to the transport system are slow and the condition of local roads is poor. Good progress is being made to address the landfill site shortage through the Minerals Local Plan and the waste PFI contract though recycling performance across the councils in the county is mixed, and there is an uncoordinated approach to sustainability.
- 69 The Council is making a major contribution to the economic well being of the county. It has been proactive in establishing the regeneration partnerships on the coastal strip, which is the area with the highest deprivation. The aim is to provide a knowledge economy based around new business and education space, with better transport infrastructure. A high profile success has been the University Centre Hastings, opened in 2003, with 640 students and with its first graduates in 2006. The majority of these students are from the local area, which helps address the need to improve the skills within the local community. The Station Plaza in Hastings, currently under development, includes a learning centre, health facilities and residential units, and is planned to create over 2,000 jobs. Already this work is having an impact on the economic activity rate in Hastings, which grew to 77.1 per cent by the end of 2005 from 71.1 per cent at the beginning of 2004. Elsewhere, the Council is supporting the Newhaven port area, including working with SEEDA and Lewes District Council to secure £4 million for the Enterprise Gateway building. More generally the Council's 'Buy With Confidence Scheme', which supports small traders, is welcomed both by the traders and community. An important element of the Council's approach is to improve the skills available in the area, and the Council and partners are meeting a key target in the LAA to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, training and employment. The Council's multi-faceted approach is making a significant impact in improving the local economy.

- 70 The Council is making good progress to address the county's landfill capacity shortage. Through the waste PFI contract it has put in place a strategy to provide an energy recovery facility as well as the network of recycling centres and waste transfer stations. However, although it is meeting the government target for recycling and has improved from 22 per cent in 2003/04, at 27 per cent, East Sussex remains in the lowest performing 25 per cent of county areas. The Council has produced a draft Municipal Waste Management Strategy in partnership with the districts and boroughs in the county, but the lack of an agreed county waste strategy hampers the delivery of a coordinated approach to tackling all waste issues. A joint waste strategy is currently under discussion, which aims to agree a consistent approach by district councils to waste collection, to enable higher levels of recycling.
- 71 The approach to improving the environment in a sustainable way is not fully co-ordinated. Climate change does not have a particularly high profile at present, although there are good examples of relevant work. These include the Council reducing its own carbon emissions from its buildings; promoting a biomass scheme; promoting Approved School Travel Plans, where 71 per cent of schools now have one and achieving walking buses to school on 28 routes; and achieving the LAA target of attracting 3,500 older people and 7,000 people on guided walks. The Council takes the leading role in the management of the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the High Weald and South Downs. Also it provides specialist advice on landscape and townscape issues to enhance improvement schemes, as well as advice to the district planning authorities. The Council recognises that the sustainability of its policies and procedures require an improved approach, and this has prompted a review of the community strategy that will have sustainability at its core. This review demonstrates leadership from the Council in identifying areas where a more focused approach is required.
- 72 Improvements to the transport infrastructure are limited. Funding decisions have reduced standards and improvements to the network are slow. Not all the buses are accessible and reliable, and the Council has just started a review to address how to manage these and other transport services in the area. Use of buses in Hastings has increased, but this is not universal and innovative community transport solutions are not widespread. Cycle use increased by four per cent in 2005/06 and the east-west cycleway network is nearing completion to join the north-south route already in place. In 2005/06, 14 per cent of principal roads were in need of repair, which is below average performance nationally. The rate of deterioration of the road network exceeds the maintenance investment of the Council by £1 million per year. The Council estimates the current gap to be about £5 million had funding kept pace with inflation and to be greater if the construction industry inflation rate is taken into account. The Council has taken a decision to target its roads investment on roads needing priority action, thereby being clear about what the public can expect, but is also taking a leading role in lobbying for more investment to improve the network. Overall the transport system is not providing an effective network.

- 73 The Council is influencing the policies required to promote the provision of affordable housing. While not a housing authority, it uses its position at regional level to ensure that the development policies in the South East Plan reflect the need to set aside a percentage of new development for affordable housing. It is also working with district councils through the Local Development Frameworks, where housing is a 2007 priority. It also funds the provision of supported and extra care housing, including 800 people under the Supporting People programme who have been able to sustain their tenancy despite a range of social and physical problems. As a result, there is a clear framework in place to increase the supply of affordable homes in the county as well as support the ability of residents to remain in their homes.

Safer and stronger communities

- 74 The Council and its partners contribute positively to making the county a safer place in which to live. The crime and disorder strategy is comprehensive and links well with the community plan. Partnership working on community safety objectives is strong, and based on mutual trust and respect. By sharing information among partners, areas of under-performance are identified and resources are targeted effectively to those areas. Performance is improving, consistent with Council priorities. Partners see the Council as good at developing policy and producing practical actions to improve community safety. As a result, the Council and partners are delivering improvements in key priority areas.
- 75 Work to tackle crime and fear of crime is increasingly successful. Crime in the county is already low, with East Sussex performing better than the national average in five of six crime types (worse than average in violent crime). The Council has been addressing the fear of crime for vulnerable people through the introduction of 'No cold calling' zones. Three have been introduced to help combat doorstep crime. While a full evaluation has not been undertaken yet, early indications are that it is beginning to make a difference about how people feel about their area, although fear of crime remains a local concern. The Council and its partners are taking a strong stance to addressing domestic violence. A new specialist domestic violence court has been established in Hastings, including a service at Accident and Emergency at the Conquest Hospital, Hastings. Repeat offences reduced from 48.5 per cent in 2001/02 to 26.3 per cent in 2006/07. The Council has appointed an Environmental Crime Enforcement Officer within the multi-agency East Sussex Fire and Rescue Team. One of the targets of this team is reducing the number of deliberate fires to fly-tipped waste and abandoned vehicles, the incidence of which has halved since the appointment. As a result, residents are benefiting through the Council and partners tackling crime and its causes.

- 76 The Council and partners are tackling anti-social behaviour successfully. The number of children and young people entering the youth justice system reduced by 17.8 per cent in 2006/07 as a result of a range of coordinated initiatives. These include focusing the work of the youth work service, coordinating and extending parenting support, targeted support for schools with high levels of absence, increasing access to activities out of school for young people, and extending the range of options for education and training for the 14 to 19 age range. Partnership work has therefore dealt successfully with anti-social behaviour through tackling a wide range of the causes of such crime.
- 77 Good progress is being made in tackling drug and alcohol misuse, with appropriate strategies in place. The three-year strategy aimed at reducing drug harm is clear, with targets set based on sound data. Substance misuse programmes, offering treatment and safer practice advice, are successful. The number of people entering them increased from 1,006 in 2004/05 to 1,566 at the end of January 2007; and at the end of January 2007, 71 per cent of people entering the programme had been retained for 12 weeks or more (which is above average nationally). Services are successfully achieving an effective balance between harm reduction and prevention.
- 78 The Council is having a limited impact on reducing accidents on roads for which it is responsible, reducing the number of high accident sites from 172 in 2000 to 98 in 2005 and the number of accidents at these sites by 79 per cent. The number of people killed and seriously injured through road accidents has reduced over the last three years, through a combination of engineering, enforcement and education measures to improve road safety. Performance is, however, below average nationally and the Council missed its target for 2005 (325, but there were 353 serious or fatal accidents). A disproportionate number of accidents occur on trunk roads (in 2006, 17 per cent of accidents were on such roads which represent 3 per cent of the road network). The Council is lobbying for the government to make improvements to these roads which will improve safety, with some success, such as the improvements to the A27 at Beddingham.
- 79 The Council is working well to help partners to deliver their role in the event of an emergency. Its Emergency Plan provides a solid framework to manage the response to major emergencies. This detailed document serves as a handbook for addressing emergency situations, making clear which organisation is responsible for what action, including a section on the role of each of the district councils plus the training available. The Council also runs an annual training event for parishes and town councils in emergency planning, and 36 such councils attended this annual event. This approach helps the Council communicate what needs to happen in the event of an emergency.

- 80 The Council is making some progress with its partners to build cohesive communities. This includes encouraging access to services in BME communities through a specialist company, strong links with the traveller community, and a successful anti-bullying team for young people that resolved 70 per cent of referrals in 2006. The Council is aware of an increasing Eastern European migrant population, especially in the east of the county, but has yet to introduce mainstream consultation with this group. The Council intends to gather up-to-date data on this growing community to help promote cohesion and achieve the Council's ambitions for all its communities. At this time, the lack of up-to-date data on this growing community detracts from the good match of the Council's ambitions to the needs of the county's communities.

Healthier communities

- 81 The Council and partners deal well with many of the health challenges facing the county's population. Although life expectancy for both men and women is higher than the national average and there is less health-related deprivation in the county than in England as a whole, there is significant health deprivation concentrated around the coastal urban areas. Teenage pregnancy rates are generally reducing but the number of road injuries and deaths remain high.
- 82 The Council's engagement with partners on developing healthier communities is good. The Council and its partners have clear objectives to improve health, particularly of older people. The appointment of a Director of Public Health in 2006, jointly with the Primary Care Trust (PCT), is leading to an increasing understanding of health inequalities in the county, a consequent health strategy, and a programme of work to underpin joint commissioning with the PCT. There had previously been gaps in understanding of problem areas within the health economy, such as in progress on mental health, though this is recently improving.
- 83 Health is improving as a result of the activities of the Council and its partners. Targets for smoking cessation in the two worst areas have been exceeded while teenage pregnancies reduced between 2000 and 2005 in all districts apart from Rother (which nonetheless remains below the National and East Sussex average), although Hastings and Eastbourne are still above the regional average. Also, successful projects with nine schools in Eastbourne and Hailsham, involving over 1,000 pupils, have helped them to make the transition to secondary school, including how to deal with stress and to adopt healthy lifestyles.

- 84 The Council and partners are investing well in healthier lifestyles. Within the Children and Young People's Plan, the percentage of schools working towards healthy schools status has increased from 31 per cent to 97 per cent against a target of 65 per cent; and a large cycle network is nearing completion to encourage children and older people particularly to exercise regularly. Drug and alcohol services for young people are good. The Council, as the largest employer in the county, is committed to improving the health of its employees and has implemented a range of flexible working options such as annualised hours and part-year working, job shares, flexi-time, home working, flexible leave and career breaks and wellbeing initiatives. Staff sickness absence rates have fallen consistently over the last four years as a result of a sustained focus on attendance management.
- 85 Access to services is improving. The percentage of accessible public buildings has increased from 7.95 per cent in 2002/03 to 55 per cent in 2006/07 though this is still short of the national target. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's 2005 recommendations on better support for carers including young carers, led to the Council introducing after-school clubs for young carers, redesigning information to be 'young person friendly' and developing healthy living days for young carers. For those who live in rural areas who have no transport or are less mobile, a mobile office tours the rural areas and gives people help, information and support on a range of issues, not just Council services. The Council has developed a PFI scheme, 'Living Well', which includes delivering special care units to develop independent living for younger people with learning disabilities. The scheme received an accolade from CSCI at a recent inspection. As a result of these initiatives, the needs of groups at risk of disadvantage are being better served.

Older people

- 86 There is a positive approach to older people. The Council and its partners are responding appropriately to the increasingly ageing population by identifying adult social care as a priority in the Council Plan and the LAA delivery plan priorities. The CSCI inspection in 2006 found a good range of services but deficiencies in services for older people with mental health needs, early onset dementia and extra care housing options. A comprehensive strategy for older people is under development that deals with the CSCI improvement areas, encompassing wellbeing as well as care. The councillor nominated as the older people's champion is focused on the wider agenda for older people and is developing plans for how this service can be improved, particularly in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. This gives an organisational focus on what needs to be improved.

- 87 A strategic approach to older people's needs is developing well. It incorporates the 'seven dimensions of independence' approach. This includes 'Getting out and about' (transport), 'Healthy finances', 'Promoting a health old age' and life-long learning (involving the University of the Third Age and Enterprising Times – a partnership project for older people in Hastings). The above themes were identified by older people as the areas most important to them. This work, led by the councillor with the role of older people's champion, has resulted in an overarching and realistic strategy for older people's services which outlines a coordinated approach to all Council and partner services that affect older people's quality of life. This strategy will replace a number of service-specific older people's plans from a range of partners. As a result, the Council is taking the right steps to identify what to improve in the services to older people.
- 88 The Council and partners take appropriate action after consulting older people. The Council undertakes meaningful engagement with older people and their representative groups through a range of activities, including older people services-specific groups and a network of independent older people's forums which incorporate a focus on BME older people. These deal with all those over the age of 50, not just the very elderly. Through this consultation, older people's forums have benchmarked their objectives against services in Shropshire, a council with beacon status for older people, and the Council brought a large group of older people's representatives from Shropshire to help the forums focus on outcomes. This approach has also engaged many other partners in service delivery such as transport operators, local district and borough councils, health, other government departments such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), as well as the voluntary and community sectors. These initiatives help to focus on a range of improvements that go beyond adult social care.
- 89 The Council and partners provide an improving range of services to older people. These services include work with Age Concern and DWP leading to over £4 million of increased welfare benefits to local residents. This approach is designed to help people stay independent for as long as possible, which is what older people said they wanted. An LAA pilot rapid response team in Eastbourne to deal with people who fall has been a great success, with support provided to help the person stay at home rather than being admitted to hospital. This support avoids the need for respite care and bed-blocking; of 126 cases this year, 91 people have managed to stay at home. The travellers' project intervention has resulted in more than 40 referrals into adult social care in its first year of operation. Direct payments are increasing, although remaining low. The number of delayed discharges from hospital has reduced in the last year from 109 to 49. Also, provision of daily living equipment provision has improved by over 30 per cent, from 2004/05 to 2005/06. The PFI project 'Living Well' will create 48 units in four different centres to support independence among older people. Older people are therefore increasingly well served by the Council and partners.

Children and young people

- 90** Outcomes for children and young people in the East Sussex are good. Children and young people are generally healthy. The range of CAMHS provision is very good and consequently access is good and waiting times are short for all but a few in rural areas. Those most in need of protection benefit from prompt support, and looked after children have good outcomes, improving particularly rapidly in secondary education. Educational outcomes are adequate overall and are improving in many aspects, although standards are not good enough. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do well, with effective help for those under the age of five and when moving to adult services. The proportion of young people continuing education or training after the age of 16 or gaining employment is satisfactory and the gap is closing against the national average.
- 91** Service management in East Sussex is good. The ambitions of the council and its partners for children and young people are excellent. Effective strategic leadership in well-established partnerships provides a clear vision and coherent priorities. There are few inconsistencies and underdeveloped priorities. Improvements are evident in many key priority areas. Management and workforce capacity is good and an energetic voluntary sector adds much to the capacity to improve outcomes for diverse groups. Good performance management systems take account of the views of children and young people well.
- 92** The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good and priorities are based on a thorough analysis of health needs. There is strong multi-agency planning for CAMHS, providing services that are innovative and inclusive although not yet meeting identified needs for all Black and minority ethnic and mixed heritage groups. Looked after children have very good health provision, with good outcomes. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from a good range of multi-agency and specific nursing teams.
- 93** Children and young people appear safe. The Local Safeguarding Children Board provides good leadership among the range of partners, with an effective business and training plan. Children are cared for and educated in safe environments. There is good multi-agency practice regarding domestic violence and bullying with strengthened provision to help the victims of racist bullying. Child protection registrations and plans are well managed. Looked after children are supported well in high quality, stable placements, with good attention from elected members through the Corporate Parenting Panel.

- 94 Outcomes in educational attainment are adequate and improving, although the rate of improvement is uneven. However, the value added by training and education, taking starting points into consideration is very good. Detailed data analysis and focused support contribute to some notably good outcomes: the improved success rate of looked after children taking GCSEs and improved attainment in Key Stage 3 English and maths. Pupils with statements in special schools make good progress. Attendance has improved and is good. Support and challenge to schools has been reshaped by the council, with better effect in secondary schools. A far-reaching review of services for special educational needs is having a good impact on the clarity and range of provision, although the effect on individual attainment is yet to be seen. Young people make good progress through involvement in youth work, although the rates of participation may be below national benchmarks.
- 95 The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good, with very high numbers contributing their views through the Big Vote, an innovative consultation scheme to decide priorities. Local democratic representation through school councils, the Youth Cabinet and UK Youth Parliament is highly inclusive. Looked after children and young people make a good contribution to improving services. Much effort is made to ensure that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities submit their views in reviews. The great majority of children and young people behave responsibly. Partners work closely together to target anti-social behaviour effectively and those who offend get satisfactory help.
- 96 Strategies to improve provision for 14 to 19 year olds are good, although, as yet, attainment outcomes are only adequate overall. The partnership has been highly successful in bidding for the new diplomas in all local areas. There is good increased flexibility, although more needs to be done to engage employers. A comprehensive electronic prospectus has improved access to information countywide. Well-focused support results in good proportions of care leavers and young people who offend who are in education, employment or training, although the proportion not in education, employment or training is still too high in some deprived areas. Specialist provision for young people with severe learning difficulties is very good. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good information and guidance.
- 97 The capacity of the council services to improve is outstanding. The high quality Children and Young People's Plan is clearly aligned to the county's community strategy and the Local Area Agreement. The review of the plan shows collective commitment from the council and partners to further integrate services and secure better outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable, based on good awareness of the areas for improvement. Integration of services, the special educational needs review and 14 to 19 partnerships have been well led and managed with some good impact. The council has a strong framework for redirecting resources to areas of need and areas of underperformance. With good management and workforce capacity, robust financial and performance management systems in place, the area has excellent capacity to continue to build on improvements.

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 East Sussex County Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 4 to 29 June 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.

Appendix 3

References to scrutiny in the Corporate Assessment Report (October 2007)

Page	Section	Observations in the report
6	Executive Summary	<i>Councillors are generally well informed and are supported by able and knowledgeable officers. Scrutiny is well developed and supports policy making.</i>
12	The Council	<i>Cross-party scrutiny committees are chaired according to the political balance.</i>
16	Prioritisation	<i>In the context of Reconciling Policy and Resources: Scrutiny committees examine critically the policy steers and assess their compatibility to the more detailed proposals emerging from the process via specially established scrutiny Member boards. Examples include the review of funding and procurement, LINks scheme and the community leadership role of councillors within the voluntary and community sectors. Reconciling Policy and Resources is therefore a robust strategy to link priorities with spend.</i>
18	Capacity	<i>Internal challenge through the scrutiny function is well established. Both staff and councillors are clear about their roles and responsibilities.</i>
20	Performance Management	<i>The role of scrutiny in performance management is well developed. The role of scrutiny in driving service improvement is strong, for example, in the revised contract for delivering transfers of care. Also when poor performance was identified on delayed transfers of care, the Council with its health partners redesigned services and put new processes in place led to significant improvement in performance.</i>
29	Healthier communities	<i>The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's 2005 recommendations on better support for carers including young carers, led to the council introducing after-school clubs for young carers, redesigning information to be 'young person friendly' and developing healthy living days for young carers.</i>