

Summary of Corporate Assessment Report

- The Corporate Assessment (December, 2007) was critical of the Council's performance management arrangements, giving the Council a score of 2, out of 4. The Audit Commission's findings are summarised below.

Performance management

- The Council is performing adequately in this area. At a service level, performance management is strong and is delivering improvement on the ground. However, this is not matched by consistent, rigorous and transparent performance management arrangements at a corporate level, or within partnerships. The effect is that although the Council is closely monitoring service improvement, it does not consistently know what progress it is making at achieving its overall ambition and priorities, especially in cross-cutting areas within partnerships (paragraph 67).
- Performance management is generally, devolved to departments which regularly monitor and manage performance; the arrangements within the departments are clear and transparent. This means that any service performance problems are identified quickly and dealt with (paragraph 68).
- Within services, performance management is effective. At service and departmental level, targets are set in line with priorities; performance and satisfaction levels are monitored and analysed, and under-performance identified and addressed (paragraph 69).
- Corporate-level performance management arrangements are inconsistent and lack rigour and transparency. Cabinet portfolio holders regularly meet with their respective departmental directors to discuss performance management and other service issues, but the format of the meetings is inconsistent and not routinely minuted. Performance is discussed at informal cabinet meetings and at regular one-to-ones between the leader and his portfolio holders, but these arrangements are ad-hoc and not transparent. Although members of the cabinet meet monthly with the officer executive board to discuss a range of policy and performance issues, decisions made at meetings are not recorded, and only those in the room know what has been discussed. Many of the current performance management arrangements reflect good working relationships, rather than a clear performance management framework, which increases the risk of overlooking poor performance (paragraph 71).
- At a corporate level, arrangements for measuring performance against strategic objectives are not effective. Because most performance management takes place within departments, it is difficult to measure progress against key corporate priorities. In addition, there is no system for managing performance in cross-cutting areas, where priorities are shared between departments. This means that measuring and reporting on overall progress only takes place at the end of each financial year, when it is too late to take any remedial action (paragraph 72).
- Councillors provide insufficient challenge to overall performance. Councillors receive quarterly performance reports, but the information lacks differentiation

by priority or risk, and it can be difficult for them to focus on the most important areas and to hold officers to account, especially in the newer cross-cutting priorities, such as reducing social exclusion. This means that often there is little discussion and debate about progress and the quarterly monitoring reports are merely 'noted' (paragraph 73).

- The Council has an effective annual cycle for integrating performance and resource planning. This means that it has the resources it needs to address its performance priorities. Service performance is regularly monitored and reported to both cabinet and scrutiny. Each quarter, financial monitoring is reported alongside performance monitoring, although discussion linking the two reports rarely occurs. It is useful for councillors to have both financial and performance information presented to the same committee, but lack of full integration reduces the impact of this (paragraph 74).
- Performance management arrangements within partnerships are not effective. In major partnerships such as the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), there is no agreed framework for the partners to manage performance against the key priorities. Key partner organisations provide updates on their overall performance to other LSP members, but this is for reporting purposes only, not to promote agreed performance management. The Council is involved with many other partnerships, but its arrangements to monitor their effectiveness are inadequate (paragraph 75).