

Overall, the Council is performing adequately. Councillors and a new corporate management team are driving forward plans to improve corporate and cross cutting working. They are building on the strong services already in place and partnership working is being strengthened. These improvements are beginning to make a difference but need to be taken further and sustained. The direction of travel is positive and there are good prospects for the future. The Council has made good achievements in a number of its priorities such as a strong economy, good housing, reductions in crime and good outcomes for children and young people but has more to do in other cross cutting areas.

Community leadership is good and there is a clear vision for the area. The Council and its partners have developed an overarching vision for the City and this is set out in the community strategy which covers the period 2004 to 2024. The vision is based around key themes such as creating confident and inclusive communities, improving and maintaining the environment, a thriving and prosperous economy, education and learning and celebrating the historic past whilst creating a successful and thriving future.

The community strategy is based on a good understanding of the needs of the area. The reparation of the strategy involved an extensive consultation exercise, a robust assessment of current performance and analysis of the issues facing the city. However, the Council does not have an overall engagement strategy and its approach to equalities and diversity is underdeveloped. This means that, whilst regular engagement with the public is carried out, the results are not shared in a systematic way and there is a risk that some groups will not have the opportunity to contribute.

The Council has clear priorities set out in its corporate strategy but arrangements to ensure a better focus on the corporate priorities are at an early stage of development. The Council has traditionally focused on its service areas rather than as a corporate whole but is now making a significant investment in improving systems to deliver priorities through a more corporate, integrated organisation. The new Chief Executive and management team are providing strong leadership and have developed a 'York Business Model' to ensure better corporate working. This builds on a number of developments put in place since a critical Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) report in 2005 which highlighted significant levels of 'silo' working amongst directorates.

Political leadership is effective and decision making is based on joint working across parties. The democratic structure has been developed to reflect the balanced political administration but aspects of scrutiny are not effective. There are some examples of added value in providing challenge and policy development but overall this is not adding sufficient value.

Human resources management is underdeveloped. The Council is developing its capacity through its organisational development approach and through leadership and management programmes. However, there are a number of weaknesses in human resources management including poor management information, workforce planning and high levels of sickness absence.

The Council is improving its corporate performance management arrangements, including the introduction of a 'dashboard' approach to focus on key corporate indicators and improvements to partnership performance management. There is a positive direction of travel but there is still much to do to ensure that there is a consistent approach across all services and partnership areas. Service performance management has been effective in most areas and the Council provides good value for money for local taxpayers. Most costs are low compared to other councils and performance is generally good. Work on strengthening the delivery arrangements for

the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has been put in place over the past year or so but there are inconsistencies in performance management across all the delivery partnerships.

Despite the inconsistencies in corporate performance management arrangements, service performance is good and there have been a number of achievements in relation to its priority areas such as the economy, recycling, traffic congestion good housing and improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children and young people. There is more to do in cross cutting areas such as health inequalities, alcohol and drugs misuse, tackling anti-social behaviour and in responding to national agendas around older people.

There have been good achievements in terms of the local economy. York outperforms its regional comparators in relation to employment, earnings and skills. Income inequalities are lower than other comparable areas and strong plans for the future are in place. The Council has also made significant progress in relation to environmental management and is providing strong leadership around the environment. In 2006, it opened its EcoDepot, which is estimated to save 176 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. Traffic congestion is being tackled and there is a strong focus on encouraging alternative methods of transport.

Good progress is being made in improving the condition and appearance of the city's housing estates and street scene. Street cleanliness is improving and parks, play areas and public spaces are of a high standard. The Council is taking steps to increase the supply of affordable housing and good progress is being made to improve the standards of existing homes. The Council is on target to achieve the Decent Home Standard by 2010.

There have been good reductions in the levels of crime and disorder as a result of strong working relationships between the police and the Council. However, there is weaker performance in relation to anti-social behaviour. Whilst there is a clear understanding of health inequalities in deprived areas, progress is at an early stage. The Council, with partners, is making good progress in promoting and supporting the independence and well being of older people but the focus is largely on social care rather than taking a broader view across all Council services.

Outcomes for children and young people in the City of York area are strong. The priority is to ensure that those from the most disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds achieve and the Council is strong in this area. Looked after children make good progress in health and are improving progress in educational and employment outcomes.