

Executive summary

- 5 Poole Borough Council is performing well. With its partners it has developed a high level vision for the Borough which is based on a good understanding of local needs gained through effective consultation. The vision and the principles on which it is based emphasise the importance of creating a vibrant community in which people follow healthy lifestyles, feel included and contribute positively to the environment and their communities. The shared vision is realistic and challenging. The Council's corporate objectives support the vision and describe the role that the Council will play in delivery. Consequently a clear strategic statement exists of what the Council and its partners want to achieve.
- 6 Corporate priorities are in place: The Council's priorities are- reviewed annually to ensure that they continue to reflect local need. They are based on good intelligence and research. This accurately describes both the demographic and economic context within which the Council works and 'specific issues such as where to target crime reduction initiatives and the needs of children and young people in an individual ward. The Council is focused on delivering its priorities and pro-actively moves resources to enable this. However the quality of service strategies is not consistent. This means that the Council is clear about what is important in the. Borough but does not always document how it will deliver .
- 7 The Council demonstrates good community leadership. It successfully promotes the Borough's interests at national, regional and sub regional level. This has contributed to the Borough being given growth point status by government. The Council also successfully reconciled conflicting views about standardising the age of school transfer and secured support for this from parents, school staff and governors. At neighbourhood level it has worked successfully with the police and local communities. to tackle deprivation and social exclusion. These actions have resulted in government support for key Council growth objectives, improved prospects for school children and enhanced quality of life for residents in deprived areas.
- 8 Political and managerial leadership is effective. Councillors provide clear policy direction and relationships between councillors, senior managers and staff are positive and supportive. The Chief Executive and strategic directors effectively coordinate the actions of service heads responsible for day-.to-day service delivery. The Council's organisational culture empowers and motivates staff and its 'flat' organisational structure promotes effective communication and clear accountability. Staff are clear about what is expected of them, adopt a 'can do' culture arid have a proactive approach to problem solving and service delivery.

- 9 The Council achieves good value for money. Key documents, such as the medium-term financial strategy, annual budgets and the capital programme focus on delivering corporate objectives. The Council supplements its own capacity through good partnership working and by successfully securing external funding to address its priorities. The quality of the Council's services compares favourably with other unitary councils and costs are relatively low. These features contributed to the Council being judged as 'performing well' in its value for money assessment in each of the past two years.
- 10 The Council is building capacity by tackling known weaknesses effectively. Its business transformation programme identifies ten work streams including building on the success of phase one of the 'Customer First' initiative, improvements to the way the Council manages its staff and a more consistent approach to risk management. It is also reviewing its governance arrangements to encourage internal challenge, clarify how councillors not on the Cabinet can influence policy and to minimise potential conflicts of interest. These measures have the potential to save £2 million a year to be reinvested in priority services and demonstrate that the Council is committed to continuous improvement.
- 11 The Council's strategic approach to diversity is good but operational aspects are underdeveloped. Consultation with staff groups representing employees from minority communities has had limited impact. The Council has achieved level two (out of five) of the local government equalities standard and is working towards level three by 2009. It actively supports the Dorset Race Equality Council and, with its partners, has adopted the '*Poole without Prejudice*' forum to progress issues relevant to minority communities. It is also working with the Roman Catholic Church to improve its understanding of the needs of migrant workers. It supports a very good faith network and promotes contact with people from BME communities through the *Cosmopolitan* network. However it has yet to achieve positive outcomes for minority groups by consistently using equality impact assessments in all service areas. Consequently the Council has yet to use its understanding of the needs of all residents to inform service delivery.
- 12 Access to services is good and improving for most people but less so for people with disabilities. The Council opened a centralised call centre in July 2007 which deals with half of all telephone calls and emails. It has plans to increase this in the future. The Council's website is easy to use and provides information about services as well as access to the complaints policy and a range of online functions. However physical access to services for people with disabilities is variable with some improvements to public transport but low levels of access to Council buildings.

- 13 Performance monitoring systems are not robust. The Council is investing in a new monitoring system. Until this is operational portfolio holders and strategic directors are monitoring performance by maintaining close contact with service heads and by attending twice yearly performance forums. The quality of action plans supporting strategic priorities is not consistently good and financial and performance monitoring information is not linked to enable councillors and officers to assess whether the Council is systematically achieving value for money. The Council is a learning organisation and uses customer feedback and satisfaction data to inform service delivery.
- 14 The Council successfully delivers local and national priorities. Its land use policies promote a diverse local economy and have improved the availability of affordable housing. They promote brown field development and improve the existing built environment while protecting natural heath land and the harbour. The community safety partnership achieves good outcomes and crime levels and the fear of crime have fallen over the last three years. Local health outcomes are generally above the national average although significant variations exist with people living in deprived areas faring less well. The Council and its partners are tackling this disparity by focussing their efforts on the most deprived wards and on improving the health of children and young people. The Partnerships for Older People Project (POPP) concentrates on areas of highest need and supplements good social care provision and a comprehensive range of services' to promote healthy and safe living for older people. Children and young people living in Poole achieve good levels of education, are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and generally feel safe. The number of young people not engaged in employment, education or training is low.

Areas for improvement

15 The Council needs to improve some aspects of its governance arrangements by:

- clarifying the roles and functions of overview and scrutiny committees to enable robust debate of future policy proposals and constructive internal challenge;
- ensuring that clear separation exists between the roles of planning policy makers and those responsible for implementation; and
- securing a consistent approach to the governance arrangements for partnerships.

16 The Council needs to improve its approach to equalities and diversity by:

- strengthening the strategic framework and securing consistent compliance throughout the Council; and
- setting clear, outcome based targets to ensure that services consistently meet the needs of all residents. '

17 The Council needs to improve its performance management practices by:

- 'improving the quality of service strategies to clarify how strategies will be delivered and how they contribute to Council priorities;
- ensuring that action plans include clear definitions of required action, timescales, measurable targets linked to improved outcomes,' accountability and resource implications; and .
- strengthening the links between strategic and service level performance management.