

# Regeneration Inspection Report

Oxford City Council

May 2009



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# Service Inspections

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our Strategic Plan and Strategic Regulation. They also reflect the principles from *The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003)*. Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater coordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's web site at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk).

This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

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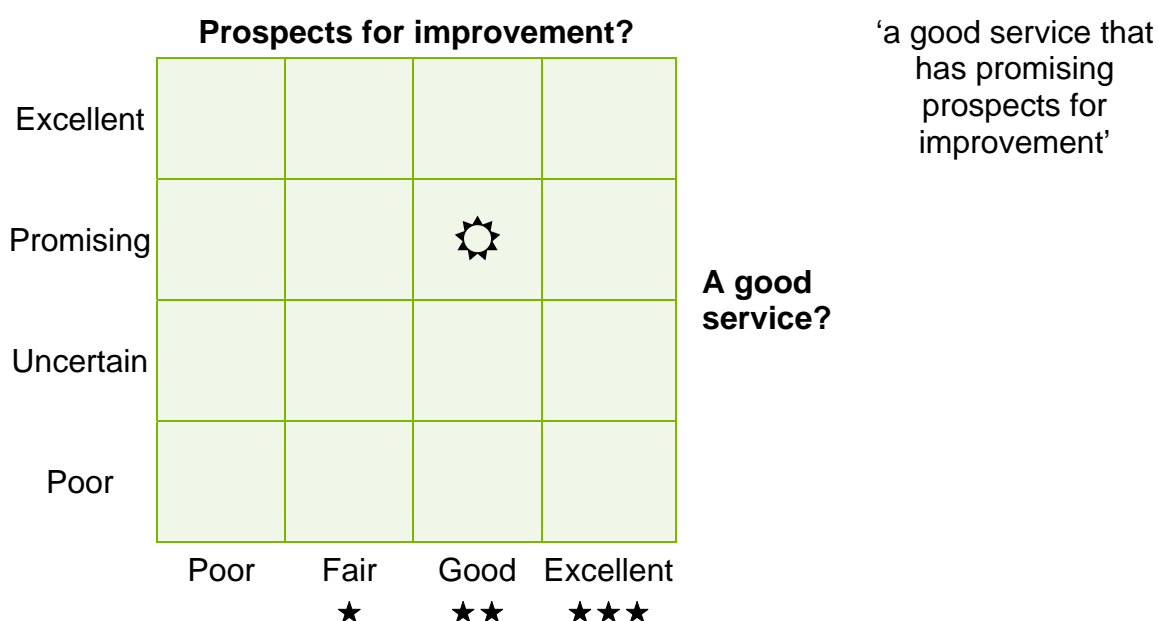
# Summary

- 1 The Council has achieved real improvements for vulnerable communities over the last five years, with a wide range of physical, economic and social projects. It has been effective at a neighbourhood level, particularly in the priority areas of Barton, Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill. It is also laying the foundations for city wide regeneration through its project to redevelop the west end of the City centre and wider proposals for employment development in the new Local Development Framework. The Council is using its own land resources and its power as a purchaser of local services to support the local economy and training opportunities for local people.
- 2 The Council has worked effectively to bring its regeneration service closer to local communities through its area committees, area action plans and devolved budgets for local initiatives. It engages actively with local people and has a strong local presence through its community development officers and vibrant community centres. It has built capacity in local communities and involved them in planning and implementing local regeneration proposals through local regeneration partnerships.
- 3 The effect of this activity has been to secure new homes within priority neighbourhoods, better community infrastructure, environmental improvements and reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour. Local people have had new educational, cultural and recreational opportunities and better access to health services. The Council does not, however, have a clear view of value for money within its regeneration service.
- 4 An extensive partnership network has grown organically to support regeneration. There have been tensions between County and City in the past, but attitudes to partnership working are now much improved and the area committee structure provides a good foundation for developing a more integrated approach to neighbourhood regeneration. Partners liaise in a variety of forums, but they do not come together coherently at a neighbourhood level and the regeneration effort lacks a comprehensive strategic approach. The Council is working to address this with its new Regeneration Framework.
- 5 The Council is well placed to build on its successes. Overall, it has shown a robust and focused approach to improvement, in line with its priorities. It has clear plans for regeneration in the Oxfordshire and Oxford community strategies, the emerging local development framework and particularly the draft Regeneration Framework. The Council has most of the resources in place to drive its regeneration programme forward. Regeneration is accepted as a key priority and resources have been allocated accordingly. The regeneration function is being brought together within the Council, assisted by workforce planning. The Council is successful in securing external funding and financial contributions from developers.

## Summary

- 6 The main challenge is to continue to develop a strategic approach to regeneration through the Regeneration Framework and to integrate the partnership at area and neighbourhood level. The Council can use the framework to help refine partnership working and improve partnership links to the area committees and neighbourhood teams. The continued improvement of joint area or neighbourhood plans will be vital to meet the challenge that public services in Oxfordshire have set themselves in 'breaking the cycle of deprivation' in parts of Oxford City. While these are important challenges for all the public services including health and police, the support and role of the County Council in driving up improvements in children and young people's outcomes will be vital.
- 7 Performance management is underdeveloped and needs to be used more effectively to secure consistent performance against the new Regeneration Framework and to demonstrate value for money. The Council can build capacity to contribute more fully to economic development, including workforce skills, work through the new Oxfordshire Economic Partnership and use this forum to secure greater local private sector involvement in neighbourhood regeneration.
- 8 We have assessed Oxford City Council as providing a 'good', two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Figure 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Audit Commission

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

9 The service is 'good' because:

- the Service has achieved a wide range of physical, economic and social outcomes and it has improved the quality of life in its priority regeneration areas, focussing regeneration resources on its three priority neighbourhoods, by:
  - providing new housing to improve and broaden local housing opportunities and create more diverse communities which have higher aspirations and greater capacity for self improvement;
  - improving community facilities, including community and leisure centres, health centres, new schools and nurseries, sports and recreation areas;
  - improving public areas, and using art projects to enhance to image of the priority neighbourhoods;
  - promoting new employment opportunities, including proposals for the physical regeneration of the western end of the city centre;
  - working in partnership to provide training and other support to help people in the priority neighbourhoods compete for new employment opportunities and tackle other problems with affect their quality of life;
  - working effectively through the Oxford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to tackle crime and disorder; and
  - promoting sports and arts in the priority neighbourhoods to extend the skills and experience of local people, particularly young people;
- it is advanced with the preparation of its Local Development Framework, which provides for employment growth at strategic locations elsewhere in the city;
- it has an effective local presence through community centres and community development workers, it engages effectively with local communities and has built community capacity to plan and implement local regeneration programmes;
- regeneration is supported by area committees with devolved powers and devolved budgets to respond effectively to community regeneration initiatives; and
- partnership working is now working well overall, following a period of tense relationships with partners, particularly the County Council.

10 However:

- the service still lacks a strategic approach to ensure a coherent partnership programme and value for money; and
- there is more to do to bring partners together effectively at a local level through the area committees.

## Summary

### 11 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- regeneration is a high priority for the Council and has cross party support. The Council has good local networks and joined up political leadership;
- the Council has well developed plans and strategies that support a shared vision for the City including a robust Medium Term Financial Strategy;
- good leadership has been demonstrated by the Council in the development of the draft Regeneration Framework to provide a more structured approach to regeneration;
- the Council is working well within the Oxford Local Strategic Partnership to bring together key partners at a local level and improvements are also being made to align key partnerships and plans under the Oxfordshire Partnership;
- the Council is improving its corporate capacity to deliver its regeneration priorities; through the current restructuring;
- the Council has managed major proposals for the regeneration of the West End effectively and developed good partnership working arrangements to support this;
- the Council supports the voluntary sector to deliver key services in priority areas; and
- the Council has an active and successful approach to external funding and the Council is ensuring that key projects continue to be delivered after initial funding has finished.

### 12 However:

- performance management of regeneration services is underdeveloped, monitoring of the delivery of regeneration plans and strategies is inconsistent and staff do not have consistently clear objectives;
- the new management structure is still in transition and there is no clear transformation plan to achieve integration and effectiveness and no corporate support for this transformation;
- partners are not yet making full use of the area committee structure and area plans to integrate their regeneration efforts at an area and neighbourhood level;
- the Council's capacity to support partners in the area of skills and worklessness is uncertain; and
- although the Council works closely with private sector development partners, wider involvement of local firms in local regeneration activity is limited.

# Recommendations

**13** To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition, we identify the approximate costs<sup>2</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council should do the following.

## Recommendation

- R1** Consolidate the work on the Regeneration Framework to develop a strategic approach to regeneration which shows how the Council and its partners will:
- manage their regeneration performance using clear and relevant outcome measures;
  - ensure a clear approach to value for money;
  - work together effectively through area management and the area committees to deliver services within neighbourhoods which meet neighbourhood priorities and the Council's strategic regeneration objectives;
  - bid for external resources; and,
  - stimulate private sector involvement in regeneration.

**14** The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a more structured approach to regeneration and improved coordination of partnership activity to maximise impacts in priority neighbourhoods; and
- a more sustainable partnership-wide approach, supporting the continued focus needed at a time of economic downturn.

**15** The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by December 2009.

## Recommendation

- R2** Use project management principles to ensure that the planning and housing teams are merged effectively to create an integrated regeneration directorate.

<sup>2</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.



## Recommendations

**16** The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a smooth and reliable transition to an integrated team that has the capacity to manage the Council's contribution to regenerations within the City.

**17** The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2009.

Recommendation
<b>R3</b> Publicise this report widely and use it as a basis for discussions with partners to see how the lessons in it can best be used to drive improvement within the service.

**18** The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2009.

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# Report

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## Context

### The locality

- 19** Oxford City Council is one of five district councils within Oxfordshire covering an area of 17.6 square miles. Oxford is best known for its world-class universities and it is also an important centre of tourism, car manufacturing and light industry. The city is predominantly urban, with a high population density. However, significant areas of the city are of high landscape or heritage value and there are significant planning challenges. For example, 27 per cent of the land area is green belt, 20 per cent is located on flood plains and 17 per cent of the city has conservation status.
- 20** Oxford is the major shopping and employment centre for the county. The population of Oxford at 2006 is estimated to be 150,100 and this accounts for nearly a quarter of the County population. The next largest centres are Banbury and Abingdon with populations of 52,000 and 36,000 respectively. In the past, this pre-eminence has created tensions between County and City and the City has argued, unsuccessfully, for unitary status.
- 21** Compared to other areas, the city has a young age profile, with two-thirds of the population under 40 and just 15 per cent aged over 60. The two universities attract 30,000 students to the city. The city is also diverse with an estimated black and minority ethnic (BME) population of 12.9 per cent at the 2001 Census (compared to 9.1 per cent for England and 4.9 per cent for the region). This includes established Chinese, South Asian and Black African/Caribbean communities, as well as more recent arrivals from Eastern Europe. The population of Oxford is expected to grow to 176,000 by 2026.
- 22** House prices in Oxford are high, ten times higher than average earnings. This ratio is far higher than the South East average. Affordability in Oxford is among the worst in the South East region, and the worst of all Oxfordshire districts. Oxford has by far the greatest number of households in housing need in the county.
- 23** The local economy has been generally healthy with only one of the city's 24 wards falling in the worst 10 per cent of wards in England and an overall deprivation ranking of 159 out of 354 councils in 2004. The relatively high proportion of jobs in the public and educational sectors makes the economy relatively more robust in the current recession. Levels of unemployment in the city are relatively low and equal to levels in the South East (1.5 per cent) but are below the national average of 2.4 per cent. However, the overall level of employment in the City has remained broadly static over the last 30 years with jobs in health, education and service sectors replacing jobs lost in manufacturing. Ninety per cent of jobs are now in service industries.

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- 24** There are, however, significant disparities in levels of education and skills, health and crime across the city. Ten Super Output Areas in Oxford are amongst the 20 per cent most deprived areas in England. These areas are in Blackbird Leys, Barton, and Rose Hill. Despite benefiting from a well qualified population overall, there are large inequalities in the geographic distribution of adult skills. In the most deprived areas, education and skills are among the 5 per cent worst in England and the rate of people with no qualifications varies from over 50 per cent in parts of Blackbird Leys to less than 1 per cent in North ward. Although the average life expectancy in Oxford is above average, there is an 11-year difference in life expectancy between the least and most deprived wards.
- 25** Barton, Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill, centre on large estates formerly built and managed by the Council. These areas had suffered from under-investment in the thirty years up to the millennium. They suffered from poor housing, run down community facilities and a degraded environment. On the largest estate, Blackbird Leys, the Community Centre had become a drinking club with a very limited community development capacity. These communities had become inward looking and self contained with a culture of low achievement reflecting poor life opportunities. The estates suffered from significant crime and disorder problems, in particular anti-social behaviour. The index of multiple deprivation still shows these three neighbourhoods as significantly more deprived than other localities in this prosperous city.
- 26** From 1996 to 2006 Oxford benefited from £6.7 million national Single Regeneration Budget funding for community regeneration projects. This focussed on the south and east of the City, particularly the neighbourhoods of Barton and Blackbird Leys. It was extended from 2005 to 2008 by the £2 million Oxford Area Programme, funded by SEEDA and the City Council. This funding is therefore coming to an end, but the Council has now bid successfully for £6.8 million Growth Point funding.

### The Council

- 27** The City Council operates alongside Oxfordshire County Council, within a strategic framework established through the Oxfordshire Partnership. This includes representation from County and City Councils, Health and other key public, voluntary and private sector agencies. The Oxford Local Strategic Partnership is helping to bring the partners together to focus on issues at a city level.
- 28** Oxford City Council consists of 48 councillors, with two councillors elected for each of the 24 wards. Following the elections in May 2008 the Council changed from no overall control to a minority Labour administration which holds 23 of the seats. The remainder of the seats are held as follows: Liberal Democrats (15), Green Party (seven); and Independent Working Class (two). The Council has a net budget of £31 million.
- 29** The Regeneration Directorate comprises about 330 staff working to four Heads of Service. These manage strategic housing and community development and planning and economic development services alongside environmental health, corporate property and climate change. The Heads of Service report to the new Executive Director of City Regeneration. The net budget for the Directorate is £11.6 million. The process of integrating the former planning and housing teams into the new Regeneration Directorate is ongoing.

- 30** The Council operates a cabinet and scrutiny system of governance, with a nine member City Executive Board reporting to the full Council. In addition, the Council has six area committees, which have delegated powers for a range of local services, and substantial local budgets. In 2008/09, the South East Area Committee administered a budget of £127,000 for local projects. Additional council resources are available through voluntary sector projects funded from a £1.6 million corporate grants budget. The Council has increased the focus on area management through its recent restructure, with neighbourhood renewal staff and area coordinators being brought together to develop more integrated support for the area committees. Two of the three priority neighbourhoods for regeneration, Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill, fall within the South East Area Committee area. Barton is in the North East Area Committee Area.
- 31** There are regeneration partnerships within each of the three priority regeneration areas. These partnerships differ in structure and approach, reflecting community capacity and the maturity of the programme in each area. Barton is in the North East Area Committee Area, Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill are both in the South East area Committee area.
- 32** This inspection is focused on the Council's efforts to regenerate areas of deprivation within the City. Regeneration activities have been delivered across a range of services including housing, leisure, arts, community development and planning and through key partnerships such as the Health and Social Inclusion Sub group of the Oxford Local Strategic Partnership. A recent extensive restructuring has brought together teams of staff in community housing and spatial planning to provide a more coordinated and focussed approach to regeneration, under the management of a new Executive Director for Regeneration.
- 33** The Audit Commissions' recent Direction of Travel inspections, summarised in our Annual Audit and Inspection Letters, have been positive about the Council's overall progress. In February 2008 the Commission carried out a cultural services inspection followed by an inspection of strategic housing in July. These concluded that the cultural service was 'fair', with 'promising' prospects for improvement and the strategic housing service was 'good', with 'excellent' prospects for improvement. This report draws on the conclusions of these inspections alongside the fieldwork for this regeneration inspection, carried out in February 2009.

# How good is the service?

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## What has the service aimed to achieve?

**34** The Oxford Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) sets out the Local Strategic Partnership's vision for the City and shows clearly how the partnership will achieve its key objective to:

**'build on existing partnerships that will, over time, effectively reduce disparities of opportunity and outcome in fields of health, education, and wealth creation in differing parts of Oxford'**

**35** The SCS links with key City Council strategies including the Corporate Plan and the emerging Local Development Framework. Its aims also relate closely with those of the Oxfordshire Community Strategy (OCS), partnership plans for Health and Social Inclusion, Children and Young People and Community Safety. The OCS has other important regeneration objectives, for example in skills and learning.

**36** The Council published its corporate plan for 2008 to 2011 in summer 2008 and its key priorities are:

- more housing, better housing for all;
- stronger and more inclusive communities;
- improve the environment, economy and quality of life;
- reduce crime and anti-social behaviour;
- tackle climate change and promote environmental resource management; and
- transform Oxford City Council by improving value for money and service performance.

**37** The Local Development Framework and the draft Core Strategy set out the vision for the regeneration of the City. The draft Core Strategy identifies the key areas for regeneration focussing on areas with high levels of deprivation, particularly Barton, Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill and on the redevelopment of Council-owned property. It highlights the need to develop key sectors of the economy and to balance housing and economic considerations. It recognises the importance of improved health facilities, educational opportunities, links to good transport infrastructure, retail, leisure, community and cultural facilities for existing and new residents.

**38** The emerging draft Regeneration Framework lays out the aims of the City Council and its key partners and sets out the regeneration responsibilities of the partners. It outlines the next steps, which include developing and agreeing measures and outcomes for the framework; reviewing the opportunities for physical and economic regeneration; carrying out options appraisal, agreeing priorities and carrying out a social and economic appraisal to identify the expected benefits.

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Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

**Access, customer care, diversity and community focus**

- 39** The Council has made good use of area committees to bring Council services closer to local communities. Through area management, the area committees are responsible for a range of local services, including street cleaning, parks and recreation facilities, community centres and planning control. They have significant devolved budgets to fund local schemes. The South East Area Committee managed a project budget of nearly £127,000 in 2008/09. The area committees are supported by Area Coordinators, who are senior managers tasked with managing Area Action Plans to address local priorities. The committees provide an important interface between local people; the Council and other partners. Community groups have used them effectively to support local regeneration activity. There are some customer and stakeholder concerns about the balance between their planning, representational and area management functions, but they are generally an effective platform for bringing the Council closer to its communities. The area committees are helping local people to shape local services and ensure that regeneration activity addresses local community priorities.
- 40** The area committee structure is backed by a good network of local access points for Council and other public services. The Council has recently opened a local office offering a wide range of services at Cowley, in the south of the city, close to the priority areas for regeneration. Within the three priority estates there are neighbourhood facilities in local community centres offering a range of council services supplemented by local initiatives including education, employment, counselling and some medical facilities. These are provided by the Council, Primary Care Trust and voluntary agencies. This means that local people have access to a wide range of services in a convenient and familiar environment.
- 41** The Council has good information on its local communities. It has prepared profiles using small area census data and it uses extensive consultation on community priorities, particularly in connection with the Area Action Plans. This information is supplemented by other consultation. For example in conjunction with the Local Development Framework (*LDF*), Learning Communities Programme and Single Regeneration Budget (*SRB*) Community Development initiatives. There are effective mechanisms in place at both County and City level for planning engagement and sharing the results within the Council and the wider partnership. This provides the Council with the information that it needs to make informed decisions on its regeneration programme.



## How good is the service?

- 42** The Council engages actively with its communities, including vulnerable and normally excluded groups. There is vigorous engagement on a wide range of strategies, plans and proposals backed up by extensive survey work. The Council and its partners have used a range of engagement techniques including citizen's panels and a citizen's jury, on line forums, planning for real and community representatives to undertake engagement work on behalf of the partnership. Local people speak highly of the Council's community workers as a vital link between the Council its local communities. The Council has invested in capacity building within local communities to help make engagement effective, for example in Barton. This helps the Council to understand local priorities and align its regeneration proposals accordingly.
- 43** The Council empowers local people to shape local regeneration programmes. Many projects have been conceived, designed and implemented within communities, facilitated by community development workers or partners from outside. The environmental improvement works in Barton and community projects in Blackbird Leys provide examples of engagement helping to shape local programmes and local people becoming directly involved in tackling local problems. The Council's neighbourhood based approach has helped it to address the particular needs of its local communities.
- 44** The Council has a strong focus on vulnerable and excluded groups. This is reflected across the organisation including councillors, managers and front line staff and in mainstream services. The strategic housing inspection reports a good range of services for vulnerable groups, for example single homeless people and rough sleepers and a healthy overall supply of supported housing including a dedicated shelter for 16 to 25 year olds, a night shelter and women's refuge. Similarly, the cultural services inspection shows that cultural services make a strong contribution to social inclusion and that cultural activity is focussed on the more deprived areas. Initiatives such as free swimming for under 17's have made a big impact on access to services in these areas. This helps the Council to ensure that its plans reflect the needs of vulnerable members of local communities.
- 45** Although, the Council has been responsive to the needs of communities in the priority regeneration areas, it lacks a well established corporate approach to equalities and diversity. The Council is starting to address this. It has basic diversity policies in place, it is developing a customer contact strategy and it has agreed a programme of Equality Impact Assessments, though it has still to make substantial progress with these. This makes it more difficult for it to be sure that it is addressing gaps in service provision.
- 46** There is extensive engagement with partners through a complex network of interactions at County Partnership,, City Local Strategic Partnership, City LSP, area and neighbourhood level, but these links have yet to be fully mapped and joined up. The Oxford Local Strategic Partnership and the Oxfordshire Partnership have reviewed their partnership structures and the next challenge is to forge clearer links with the Area Committee and neighbourhood management structures. The Council has appointed a Partnership Development Manager to address this issue and to coordinate agendas, briefings and officer contributions across the partnerships. Until this work is completed, it is difficult for the Council to be sure that partners are working effectively together at a local level and delivering value for money.

### Regeneration Achievements

- 47** Over the last eight years, the Council has secured real improvements for vulnerable communities through a wide range of physical, economic and social projects funded from a variety of sources. Regeneration activity has broadened from a housing focus to include community development, planning and wider partnership activity. It now embraces employment, health and education issues. An integrated approach to regeneration has been stimulated by a number of successful SRB schemes, which secured nearly £27 million of public, private and voluntary sector investment in the priority areas followed by the £2 million investment through the SEEDA funded Oxfordshire Area Programme. This integration is not yet complete, but most of the components are now in place. As a result the Council can demonstrate good regeneration outcomes in its three priority areas, with significant impacts in Barton, improvements in Blackbird Leys and the foundations for improvement in its more recent initiatives in Rose Hill and in the west end of the city centre.
- 48** Resources are effectively directed towards the priority areas. Partnership programmes and mainstream funding are orientated towards the priority neighbourhoods - Barton, Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill. For example, there has been significant capital investment in sports and community facilities serving Barton and Blackbird Leys. These resources are supplemented by delegated budgets administered by the Area Committees to implement their Area Action Plans and respond to initiatives developed within local communities. The Council also uses Section 106 agreements to secure regeneration benefits within the priority neighbourhoods. For example, a substantial proportion of the resources available to the Rose Hill partnership come from a section 106 agreement attached to the planning permission for housing development there. This means that scarce resources are being targeted to areas of greatest need and this promotes value for money.

### Physical and environmental regeneration

- 49** The Council has used new housing investment creatively to promote regeneration. The Council has achieved substantial renewal of properties which were in poor condition or poorly adapted to modern requirements and it has reviewed housing layouts to create new development opportunities. In Barton, the Council has worked with partners to build 259 new dwellings over the last four years including 83 social rented and 35 shared ownership dwellings. There has been large scale housing investment in Rose Hill as well, with a scheme underway to replace 99 poor quality system built homes with 199 new homes, including 101 social rented homes and 40 shared ownership. There have also been smaller scale housing developments on Blackbird Leys. These schemes have been successful in, providing a wider range of housing opportunities for local people, creating more diverse communities, and improving the physical environment in the priority areas.



## How good is the service?

- 50** The Council has also invested alongside partners to improve the facilities on the priority estates. It completed an extension to the Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre in 2006. At Barton, a new leisure centre was completed in 2006 with a wide range of sports and leisure facilities including a four lane swimming pool. The Council has also refurbished key sports facilities and recreation grounds on the estates, for example at Gillian's Park and Spindlebury in Blackbird Leys and Waynelete Road in Barton and at Rose Hill. The Council has secured funding for a new play park in Barton in 2009. Terms of reference of new Leisure Trust reflect regeneration objectives and offer prospects of improved leisure services in priority areas. The Council has also supported partners to invest in the priority neighbourhoods. A new Academy opened in 2008 to serve Barton and Blackbird Leys. Supported by Oxford Brookes University it replaces the former secondary school. A new primary school has been built in Barton. The new Blackbird Leys Health Centre was completed in 2005. As a result, local people have access to better health, education and community facilities.
- 51** The Council is also making good progress with the early stages of its regeneration programme at Rose Hill. This programme is more recent and the major housing redevelopment is still underway. A regeneration partnership has been established with resources to be released in phases from a £406,000 Section 106 payment made in connection with the new housing development in the neighbourhood. There has already been significant investment in facilities for the Rose Hill Children's Centre, in the local primary school and in nursery facilities. Finally, the Council has refurbished its community centres at Barton, Blackbird Leys and Northway. These community investments are providing local people with good quality accommodation to deliver a wide range of social regeneration initiatives described below.
- 52** The Council has facilitated some good quality public realm improvement schemes on the priority estates and these have consolidated the other physical improvements described above. It has tackled a run down neighbourhood shopping centre in Barton with a £350,000 scheme which created a new public space including public art. Traders and community leaders confirm that this has been successful in improving trading conditions and improving the overall image of the estate. Elsewhere in Barton, a developer-funded scheme has improved the Bayswater Brook amenity area, introducing measures to improve its biodiversity. Public art projects in Blackbird Leys have provided a focus for community development activity while adding interest to the local environment. In the City Centre, high profile environmental improvements in Bonn Square have improved the access to the Westgate Shopping Centre and its links with the west end regeneration area. These improvements have improved public perceptions of hitherto run down areas.
- 53** The Council is using the local development framework to extend investment in these areas and build more diverse communities. It is preparing an Area Action Plan to provide an additional 800 homes adjacent to the Barton estate to further extend and diversify this community, to provide additional community infrastructure through planning agreements and to improve links with the City Centre. It is also exploring options for a 4,000 home extension south of Blackbird Leys to meet housing needs and secure additional investment, including a new district centre. This shows that the Council is planning ahead to sustain neighbourhood regeneration.

## Economic Regeneration

- 54** The Council is tackling economic development issues effectively at a strategic level. The Local Plan and the LDF Core Strategy make generous provision for employment land, within the constraints of regional Planning Guidance. The Council is promoting a new gateway development in the north of the City to help the City fulfil its potential as a major international employment centre. This will generate up to 4,200 jobs and the Council is starting to prepare an Area Action Plan to bring this forward. It has worked over a long period to provide replacement employment opportunities in the south of the city to compensate for the loss of manufacturing jobs in the car industry. As a result the Council has maintained employment opportunities close to its priority regeneration areas.
- 55** The Council is working well with partners to pursue regeneration opportunities to the west of the City Centre. The west end development is a strategic initiative designed to help Oxford fulfil its role as an international employment centre. It builds upon a successful scheme to turn the castle and former prison into a hotel and conference centre. The Council has shown leadership in promoting this scheme with the support of the County Council and SEEDA, putting formal plans together and building a firm partnership to advance the scheme. The project will provide 830 new homes and nearly 4,000 jobs in retail commercial and hotel developments. The scheme includes proposals for retail and construction skills academies to ensure that residents can acquire the skills to participate in this new labour market. It will also provide a range of high profile environmental improvements. The Council has supported employers through a public /private sector partnership OX1, which is now being re-cast within the Council. The Council has brought its west end plans to the point of implementation, though this is likely to be delayed as a result of the prevailing economic difficulties. The partnership is using this time to refine its plans and continue with site assembly to ensure that the scheme remains relevant when an upturn makes it feasible again. This shows that the Council is doing the right things now to lay the foundations for sustainable housing and employment opportunities in the centre of the city.
- 56** Within the three priority neighbourhoods, the Council worked effectively with partners to provide a wide range of economic initiatives. These include grants for training and small business set ups - a wide range of learning training opportunities through the Learning Communities Project, funded by SEEDA through the Oxfordshire Area Partnership. This project researched local learning priorities, using learning champions drawn from the local community, and laid on a wide range of courses to meet these. Over three years, nearly 600 people went through the scheme and almost half of these were assisted to get a job as a result. The City Council is working with the County Council to examine ways of continuing this project now that SEEDA funding has ended. Business Link also provides services within the priority neighbourhoods to help local residents improve their prospects of employment. In the medium term the Council is working with Oxford and Cherwell Valley College to provide a new vocational training facility in Blackbird Leys. The Council uses its local grants effectively to assist the economy within its priority neighbourhoods. For example, it funds the ethnic minority business service to meet the particular needs of ethnic minority businesses. It also funds some social enterprises, for example the Eatwells Café at Barton. These initiatives are helping local people into work and supporting local businesses.

## How good is the service?

- 57** The Council uses its own procurement and asset management to support local employment. Larger building contracts include provision for local training to ensure that residents have the opportunity to compete for jobs in the area. For example, at Rose Hill, the housing renewal contract provides for 300 person weeks of training. The Council also provides capacity building for small local enterprises to help them tender competitively for council contracts. Agency contracts require suppliers to give preference to local labour. This shows that the Council is making best use of its purchasing power to secure training and employment opportunities for local people.
- 58** The Council is using its own assets to support the regeneration programme. It has extensive land holdings in the priority areas and it uses these creatively to facilitate new regeneration activity. It is however taking full market value from commercial schemes, but it is considering discounted land sales to stimulate appropriate development in difficult market conditions. In this way, the Council is maximising new development opportunities and the opportunities that they bring to enhance the priority neighbourhoods and it is helping to sustain these through the economic recession.
- 59** The Council is starting to work effectively with partners on strategic economic development issues, but it has not had the capacity to make a full contribution at an operational level. The Council works through the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership (OEP) to promote Oxford as an inward investment opportunity, to support local employers and to address skills issues. OEP has been restructured to take a lead in this area, absorbing functions from the County Council. The Council is engaging with OEP at a senior level but it has only had one member of staff available to work with the Partnership at an operational level. This means that the Council is not always able to make a full contribution in this area. The recent restructuring spreads economic development responsibilities to help it address this issue in the future.

### **Social Regeneration**

- 60** The Council is actively and effectively engaged in a variety of projects to stimulate social regeneration. The Community centres at Blackbird Leys and Barton provide the stimulus for a large number of small scale projects developed in response to local needs. These are facilitated by the Council's community development officers and community centre managers. These were originally funded through the SRB programme and community development initiatives, but many have now been mainstreamed by the Council or its partners. In Barton, the Community association has assumed responsibility for these projects, while in Blackbird Leys they are managed through the community centre. These include, advice and counselling, healthy eating projects - homework clubs, credit union - sound studio and play schemes. The scope of these projects is extended in many cases by the involvement of volunteers from within the community. There is also a wide range of support to local people through the supporting people programme and outreach provided in conjunction with registered social landlords (RSLs). This means that the Council is supporting local people to broaden their experience and skills and helping them to deal with the day to day problems that make life more difficult for them.

- 61** The voluntary sector is actively engaged in delivering services and the Council supports this activity. It provides funding to the Oxfordshire Council for Voluntary Action (OCVA) to support and develop the voluntary sector infrastructure, in particular for vulnerable community groups. The City Council and OCVA jointly host six monthly Voluntary Sector Forums in the City at which there are training workshops and information exchange. In addition the Council is represented on the Oxfordshire Voluntary Sector Development Partnership which is tasked with strengthening the community and voluntary sector county wide.
- 62** The Council has worked effectively with the Oxford Community Safety Partnership and local Neighbourhood Action Groups to tackle crime and disorder issues in the priority areas. Action includes funding for additional police community support officers and neighbourhood wardens and a commitment to diversionary activities including play schemes. Police make full use of Community Centres to engage with local communities and at Rose Hill the Council has provided a new police base to facilitate this work and installed CCTV to monitor trouble spots. Recent public perceptions of crime reduction and anti-social behaviour are that the Council and its partners are having a positive effect. Within the priority neighbourhoods police report significantly improved conditions. Public confidence in community safety is important to underpin wider social, economic and physical regeneration.
- 63** The Council and its partners have used sports and arts effectively to support regeneration. There is a wide range of community based arts activity ranging from installations and street furniture, painting, and music. The Community Centre at Blackbird Leys has a busy recording studio. Modern Art Oxford is funded by the Council to provide art outreach and has established a good track record of involving all sections of the community. The cultural services inspection confirms the cultural focus on the priority regeneration areas and vulnerable groups. The Council has an active sports development unit. Investment in infrastructure, for example new floodlights at the Rose Hill pitches have enabled extended uses and more effective diversionary activity for young people. These activities provide local people with new experiences and skills, which can improve quality of life.

### Generally

- 64** The Council's efforts to deliver physical, social and economic regeneration have delivered concrete improvements for local people. Although the Council cannot demonstrate that it has reduced disparity and inequalities on a broad front, for example in earnings or health outcomes, there is general agreement among local people and partners that conditions have improved and are still improving in the priority estates. This view is supported by the national Index of Multiple Deprivation, which shows improvement in these localities. Overall, Oxford's position in the national ranking of multiple deprivation improved by six places between 2004 and 2007, which is the largest improvement for any UK city. Barton is now a more balanced community with good infrastructure and an effective community association to carry regeneration forward. Conditions have improved on Blackbird Leys, people feel safer, vandalism has fallen and there is a thriving community centre delivering a wide range of services for local people. In Rose Hill the regeneration has come later and has a stronger housing focus, but things are moving forward. This shows that conditions are getting better for local people.

## How good is the service?

**65** Private sector involvement in regeneration is under developed. This is starting to improve through the Oxford Economic Partnership, but there are few examples of direct private sector involvement in the priority areas, for example, through sponsorship or volunteering schemes. There has been some good involvement of the major educational institutions, particularly with Oxford Brookes University through the learning Communities Project, but there is scope to extend this given the very substantial scale of higher educational activity in the City. The Council is therefore missing an opportunity to bring additional skills and resources into its regeneration effort.

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## Is the Council delivering value for money?

**66** The Council does not have a clear view of value for money (vfm) within the service. Although vfm is one of the Council's six key priorities and vfm considerations are built into all service plans as a specific consideration, the Council does not fully evaluate the value for money from its regeneration activities. It does not routinely benchmark costs and benefits and it cannot show how its costs compare with others. This limits its ability to demonstrate that it is delivering value for money.

**67** The Council currently lacks a strategic regeneration framework to help it to assess value for money. The programme has grown organically and the Council's neighbourhood based 'bottom up' approach means that the programme is orientated towards neighbourhood priorities. Links between strategic priorities and ground level activity have been under-developed and there have been weak mechanisms to ensure that locally generated projects address corporate priorities and do not duplicate existing activity. The Council is starting to address this issue through its draft Regeneration Framework and a more structured assessment of grant applications to Area Committees. Until these are established it is difficult for the Council to establish overall priorities and assess whether it is achieving value for money.

**68** The Council does not yet have the performance management arrangements in place to underpin effective assessment of value for money. Schemes and projects do not all have measurable milestones and outcomes established and they are not routinely reported as part of the corporate performance management system. Without this it is very difficult for the Council to measure value systematically.

**69** The Council actively seeks to work in partnership to increase capacity and improve value for money, but it does not have a structured approach to assessing vfm in partnerships. Again, it lacks the performance management arrangements to underpin this. This makes it difficult for it to evaluate the effectiveness of partnerships.

**70** There are nevertheless some strengths in Council's approach to vfm. The Council has effective budgeting arrangements in place to drive down costs and maintain focus on priorities. Budgets are carefully tested and reviewed to identify savings opportunities while maintaining services in priority areas such as regeneration. This is evident in the recent budget testing round where the Council maintained the level of discretionary grant award to deprived areas because of its contribution to the regeneration programme. The targeting of resources to priority areas is an aid to value for money.



- 71** The Council has been successful in securing external funding to increase its capacity and reduce costs to local taxpayers and this supports value for money. Section 106 agreements are being used to bring significant private sector resources into regeneration. It has also bid successfully to external funding programmes including New Growth Point funding. These programmes generally include an assessment of costs and outputs and so have value for money considerations built in to them. However, bids for external resources have been opportunistic. To address this larger bids are also considered by an Executive Board, which considers how bids will support the Council's objectives. The Council has also used consultants to develop a more coordinated bidding approach for the west end project and developed a systematic approach to bidding for LAA reward funds. This may provide a model for wider bidding activity in conjunction with the new Regeneration Framework. This is helping the Council to build capacity reduce demands on local taxpayers and secure value for money.
- 72** The Council is introducing new organisational, planning and benchmarking arrangements that will provide a more solid platform for vfm. The Council's new regeneration directorate and the integration of regeneration functions will help it to group and manage its regeneration costs. This is supported by the more strategic approach to programming that will be introduced through the draft Regeneration Framework. This will encourage more effective project and performance management and support vfm. The Council is reviewing and refining its partnership arrangements in conjunction with the introduction of the Regeneration Framework to ensure that partners work effectively together in the interests of value for money. There are already good examples of coordination, for example, through the Supporting People Partnership and the well being hub. Finally, the Council is engaged with the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Partnership (MKOB) and it is using this to benchmark some aspects of planning work. Again, this presents an opportunity to review regeneration costs and outcomes with similar organisations.

# What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

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## What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

**73** Overall, the Council can demonstrate a good track record over the last two years in organising itself to deliver regeneration more effectively. This is part of the Council's overall robust and focused approach to improvement, in line with its priorities. The Council displays strengthening collective leadership, and greater ambition and vision. Regeneration has had cross party support and changes in political leadership have not materially affected the Council's progress.

- The Council has successfully focussed considerable regeneration resources on the priority neighbourhoods. This has involved realigning its own mainstream budgets and showing leadership to partners to secure improvements in education health and other facilities, particularly:
  - new housing to improve and broaden local housing opportunities and create more diverse communities;
  - improved community facilities, including community and leisure centres, health centres, new schools and nurseries, sports and recreation areas;
  - improved public areas;
  - new employment opportunities, training and other support;
  - sports and arts provision in the priority neighbourhoods; and,
  - other community development initiatives.
- It has introduced area management, with an area committee system supported by area managers, area action plans and a substantial devolved budget. Area action plans have been reviewed and it is currently refreshing the staff support structure for each area committee.
- It is currently half way through implementation of a new management structure to give a clearer focus to regeneration. This has included some significant new senior appointments and an integration of housing, planning and community development functions into a regeneration directorate.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- The Council has transformed its approach to partnership. Under the leadership of the new Chief Executive, it has reformed a rather isolationist culture in favour of a much more open approach to partnership working. Relationships with the County Council have improved significantly over the last two years and other partners also recognise a much more collaborative approach.
- The Council has laid solid foundations for the city's west end redevelopment, establishing an effective partnership with good strategic direction and appropriate project management and performance management arrangements. This provides a potential model for other projects.

- 74** Prioritisation, effective local working arrangements, organisational effectiveness and partnership working are essential prerequisites of successful regeneration. The Council can show that it has a good track record over the last two years in developing these, though there is still room for development in these areas.
- 75** External evaluation shows that the Council has good mainstream services in the relevant areas and that it has delivered successful regeneration projects through the national Single Regeneration Budget initiative. The recent Audit Commission Inspection of the Strategic Housing Service found a good service with excellent prospects for improvement. The Commission's earlier Cultural Services inspection found a fair service with promising prospects for improvement. This noted the strong contribution of cultural services to social inclusion. External assessments of SRB projects in the south of Oxford show generally good use of resources and positive outcomes. The Oxford Area programme has also been well regarded by stakeholders. In planning the Council has made good progress with its Local Development Framework, with an approved core strategy, and Area Action Plan adopted for the west end development and Area Action Plans underway in other key localities. This provides assurance that the Council has the commitment and capacity to deliver good services and manage complex regeneration programmes and this provides a sound platform for future improvement.
- 76** The Council can demonstrate tangible progress as a result of these improvements, but it lacks comprehensive empirical evidence to support this. Local people and partners generally accept that conditions have improved in the priority neighbourhoods as described above. Housing is improved, new community infrastructure is in place, the environment has been improved and local people have been empowered to become involved in planning for the future and delivering regeneration services within their communities. Overall, this shows that the Council has done the right things to improve conditions in the priority regeneration areas.
- 77** The principal area of weakness is in improving vfm. The Council does not yet have the systems in place to measure this. It cannot therefore demonstrate a track record of improving vfm.



## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

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### How well does the service manage performance?

#### Working with partners

- 78** The Council has well developed plans and strategies that support a shared vision for the City. The Local Development Framework and the draft Core Strategy set out the vision for the regeneration of the City and has clear links to the Council's Corporate Plan, Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) and with its most important partners through the Oxfordshire Community Strategy (OCS). The draft Core Strategy sets out where regeneration will take place, focussing on areas with high levels of deprivation and on the redevelopment of Council-owned property. It recognises the importance of providing improved health facilities, educational opportunities, links to good transport infrastructure, retail, leisure, community and cultural facilities for existing and new residents. Sitting underneath the high level plans are a range of strategies and partnerships. These include the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership; Health and Social Inclusion sub-group; housing and associated strategies; the children and young peoples plan; social inclusion strategy; culture strategy; and, community safety and cohesion plans. Having clear, consistent and shared plans will help the Council and its partners to deliver the right type of services and improvements in the areas where need is greatest.
- 79** The Council has ambitious plans and provides strong political and managerial leadership. For example in the regeneration of the West End, effective management and cross party support has driven forward this major regeneration project. The Council has worked closely with a number of partners including the County Council and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) to produce the West End Action Plan, adopted in June 2007. The Council has demonstrated good leadership in the development of the draft Regeneration Framework. This is a big step forward for the service, engaging with partners to introduce a strategic approach to regeneration for the first time. The Framework is a comprehensive document which clearly lays out the aims of the Oxford Local Strategic Partnership and its most important partners. There is a draft action plan which is SMART and will help ensure a joined up approach to delivering the regeneration plans. It outlines the next steps which include developing and agreeing the principles of the framework with partners, and developing performance measures and outcomes of the framework. The Council is well positioned to take the lead to drive the plans forward across a range of regeneration initiatives.
- 80** The Council has a sound Medium Term Financial Strategy. The strategy demonstrates how the Council is managing its resources to focus on its priorities and those it delivers in partnership. These include cross cutting issues such as the roll-out of the Neighbourhood Policing Programme with Thames Valley Police. This means that the Council's future plans and ambitions are resourced.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 81** The Council is ensuring that partnership arrangements continue to drive improvements in service delivery. A review of the arrangements of the partnerships responsible for the delivery of the targets in the Oxfordshire 2030 Delivery Plan took place during 2008 to ensure that the governance is robust and consistent across partnerships; that membership is inclusive and that partnerships are best placed to improve outcomes. The shared City/County Partnership Development Manager was a member of the review board. The Partnership Development Manager's responsibilities include supporting increased partnership working across Districts and the development and delivery of the Oxfordshire Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.
- 82** The Council is working effectively with partners in the Oxford Local Strategic Partnership to deliver improved outcomes for local people. The Health and Social Inclusion Group action plan 2008-2012 has a clear set of actions to improve the health of adults and young people and skills and training with clear measurable outcomes and links to key partners. The action plan links to national and local area agreement indicators and is monitored through the Oxford Local Strategic Partnership steering group. The partnership includes all of the most important groups including the voluntary sector and the economic development partnership. This is a good example of bringing together partners to deliver improved services at a community level and can provide a model for similar working in other areas.
- 83** However, the Council's own area management is not being used effectively to drive improvement in all areas. Area plans have been developed in response to local issues and this has happened in a non-strategic way, in the absence of a strategic regeneration framework. There are some good links with partners, for example the police, but links between other key services are underdeveloped. The draft Regeneration Framework will provide a platform for a more strategic approach and the Council is now working to improve area planning and links to corporate and partnership priorities are being strengthened. Further work is planned with Area Committees to develop their role in performance monitoring and management at a local level. Until then, opportunities to deliver improved local services with partners are not being explored fully and the Council cannot demonstrate that it is addressing strategic priorities in the most effective way to deliver value for money.

### Corporate processes

- 84** The Council's performance management of regeneration services is underdeveloped. The Council has improved its corporate performance reporting through the Corporate Performance Board and the integrated performance management reporting tool which draws together a range of information including Council Plan and LAA priorities. However, the Council's high level performance report 'Performance Matters' does not provide a clear indication of performance in relation to regeneration across the Council's six priorities. High level indicators such as health inequalities, wealth, employment, educational attainment have not been included unless they form part of the LAA commitment. The system provides the potential to bring this information together, but it is not widely used for this purpose. As a result, the Council is unable to measure or understand how well it is delivering against its regeneration priorities and whether its interventions are improving the quality of life for people living in deprived neighbourhoods.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 85** Monitoring and evaluation of the delivery of the Council's regeneration plans and strategies is inconsistent and staff do not have clearly set out objectives. Much of the delivery work carried out by front line staff is influenced by a range of plans and strategies but systematic monitoring is not happening in all areas. For example the young people's diversionary activity; food development; older persons support work and play provision are clear corporate/partnership priorities, but monitoring mechanisms are not consistently applied. There are good examples of monitoring of team and theme plans, for example, in the safer communities' partnership and service strategies such as Housing and Homelessness where there are clear action plans, but these are not evident in all areas. The Council acknowledges that the staff appraisal system could work better to make the links clearer and this is being addressed as part of the Investors in People review. This means that front line staff may not be focussing on delivering corporate or partnership priorities.
- 86** Workforce plans to deliver the full integration of the regeneration function are lacking. The new management structure promises greater effectiveness, but it is still in transition. The Council has created a joint management team, but there is no clear workforce plan to achieve integration and effectiveness and no corporate support for this transformation. High level service plans for delivery of Community Housing and Communities, City Development and Business Transformation objectives do not contain actions to achieve integration across the key work areas of communities and spatial planning. The 2007 report to board on the proposed senior management restructure does not provide a clear plan for implementation below senior management level. The timetable proposed in the report ends in January 2008 with the review of detailed structures below Service Heads. Without overall coordination of the integration process, the Council cannot guarantee that it will proceed in a timely and effective manner.
- 87** The Council uses a range of mechanisms to facilitate shared learning both internally and externally but the approach is uncoordinated. Learning is shared at a high level through the Corporate Transformation Board and strategy and with partners through the LSP officer group and through reviews of SRB and other schemes such as the County-led Learning Communities Scheme. The Council uses feedback mechanisms from residents, community and staff consultation, for example, Talkback for housing to deliver improved services but these are not linked within a strategic framework and the Council's consultation strategy and customer contact strategy are not yet approved or published. The Milton Keynes Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Improvement Partnership provide opportunities for external learning such as the 2007 evaluation of local community projects and councillor engagement in Oxford's Area Action Plans. Key learning opportunities may be missed as a result of poor coordination.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

**88** The Council is introducing new organisational, planning and benchmarking arrangements that will provide a more solid platform for vfm. The Council's new regeneration directorate and the integration of regeneration functions provides clear potential to group and manage its regeneration costs. This is supported by the more strategic approach to programming that will be introduced through the draft Regeneration Framework. This will encourage more effective project and performance management and support vfm. The Council is reviewing and refining its partnership arrangements in conjunction with the introduction of the Regeneration Framework to ensure that partners work effectively together in the interests of value for money. There are already good examples of coordination, for example through the Supporting People Partnership and the well being hub. Finally, the Council is engaged with the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Partnership and it is using this to benchmark some aspects of planning work. Again, this presents an opportunity to review regeneration costs and outcomes with similar organisations.

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## Does the service have the capacity to improve?

**89** Regeneration is a high priority for the Council and has cross party support. The Council has good local networks and joined up political leadership. Area Committees are an effective mechanism for engaging with local communities with some good outcomes. The portfolio lead role for regeneration now coincides with the Executive Director role providing a more focussed approach. There is general political support that the Council's focus should be on regenerating the most deprived areas and safeguarding vulnerable communities. The budgeting process for 2009/10 ensured that funding for the most deprived areas was secured via efficiency savings in other areas for example the investment in Police Community Support Officers, street wardens, CCTV and community grants. This will facilitate prompt decision making and better coordination of delivery plans.

**90** New and effective leadership within the Council is widely recognised. Key partners are optimistic that the Council has put in place the right foundations to move forward with its regeneration plans but it is still very early days. The emerging regeneration framework has seen the City take a lead on developing a longer term vision in collaboration with its key partners. The newly formed Oxford Local Strategic Partnership led by the Primary Care Trust is seen as providing a promising framework for future partnership working. The test for the City and its partners is to develop a more strategic/ sustained approach, to work out how to engage with local people more effectively and to encourage a long term sustainable partnership approach. Improved leadership gives partners confidence that the Council is committed to the delivery of successful regeneration.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 91** The Council is improving its corporate capacity to deliver its regeneration priorities. The Council has a range of skilled and enthusiastic staff with a body of regeneration experience. Building on this the Council has created a centralised team with a new structure to give focus to regeneration. Weekly senior management team meetings are ensuring a more integrated approach. A joint district/county Partnership Development Manager post has been created that is strengthening the links with key partners. Project management training is being provided for staff involved in managing key projects and further management training is being provided to senior and front line managers. A corporate workforce plan is being developed and is due to be implemented shortly. Lower levels of restructure are due to take place shortly. A more coordinated approach to delivery will ensure improved value for money outcomes.
- 92** The Council is developing a robust approach to partnership working. At a strategic level a new, more open, approach to partnership working is evident. The Council is actively involved at a senior level with key partnerships including the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership, the Learning and Skills Partnership and MKOB. The West End Partnership is a well structured and well managed partnership and provides a key learning opportunity for the Council. The council has improved its coordination of work delivered through key partnerships via the Partnership Development Manager who represents all of the district council's on a number of working groups developing county- wide strategies and plans. .Enthusiastic and vigorous partnerships are delivering a range of regeneration outcomes at countywide, citywide and neighbourhood level such as the Community Safety Partnership which is reducing anti social behaviour through the CANACT project, the Oxford Sports Partnership which links into the local community sports network and has made successful bids for funding for a new pool at Cowley and Arts Partnerships such as Oxford Inspires which includes the two universities, Oxfordshire County council and the Arts Council. Effective partnership working can lever in significant additional capacity and more effective delivery.
- 93** The Council has effective plans for its workforce around delivery of its key regeneration priorities. A corporate workforce plan is being developed corporately and is due to be implemented shortly. Plans for the high level management restructure went through a thorough workforce and capacity planning exercise in 2007 linking the new structure to the Councils priorities. It laid out the rationale for the City Regeneration Directorate to be better placed to give a strategic focus to the place shaping agenda both on a city wide and area basis. Improving partnership working with the universities, research organisations and the business sector and being a major driver of economic and culture change. The Council can be confident that it has the right people with the right skills in place to deliver its programme of regeneration.



## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 94** The Council has an active and successful approach to external funding but this is not always strategically driven and lacks corporate support. The Council has successfully secured significant inward investment, for example £6.8 million through the New Growth Points Fund, which has the potential to deliver 5692 new homes for Oxford. Two point three million pounds was secured for the new homelessness prevention service in the city at the Old Fire Station. The Council has adopted a strategic approach for the LAA Reward bid which was coordinated with partners to ensure City's needs were incorporated into the bids. A more strategic approach and corporate support for bidding could reduce duplication and maximise the Council's opportunities for gaining external funding.
- 95** The Council effectively supports the voluntary sector to deliver key services in priority areas. The Council provides funding to the Oxfordshire Council for Voluntary Action (OCVA) to support and develop the voluntary sector infrastructure and has recently increased this to develop the capacity of community groups, such as faith groups and older people's groups, providing services to vulnerable people.
- 96** The Council provides funding to support the infrastructure of the Voluntary Sector Development Partnership and has recently increased this to develop the capacity of vulnerable groups, such as faith groups and older people's groups. This builds capacity within communities enabling them to support themselves and increases community cohesion and vibrancy.
- 97** The Council has good exit strategies for temporarily funded schemes. For example, the Council has worked with the County on sustainability of the Learning Communities Scheme. This has been achieved through the redevelopment of the Northway Community Centre where the Council has provided additional funding to expand the facility to enable an IT suite to be incorporated rather than a stand alone service elsewhere on the estate. This means that support is secure and that delivery of improvements are sustainable.
- 98** The service is organising itself effectively to address the economic development agenda, but capacity to deliver some economic development outcomes is uncertain particularly in the field of skills and worklessness. Following the recent restructuring the Directorate has taken on board economic development and regeneration with only a small team delivering a large remit. At a strategic level the Council's input into the key economic development partnerships has been strengthened with the Executive Director taking a leading role on the Oxford Economic Partnership and the Partnership Development Manager attending the Learning and Skills partnership. At an operational level, capacity to support partners on economic development issues, for example skills and worklessness, is very limited. Work on physical economic development proposals, for example, through the Oxford Employment Land Study 2006 and the development of the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan, is well resourced. The focus on skills and unemployment is crucial to ensure that the impact of the economic downturn on already deprived areas is minimised and that disadvantaged residents are well placed to take advantage of improved economic conditions when they arrive.

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 0844 798 1212, Fax: 0844 798 2945, Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946

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