

Inspection report

July 2005



Economic Regeneration

Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council

Improving public services

The Government has placed a duty upon local councils to deliver services to clear standards – of cost and quality – by the most economic, efficient and effective means available.¹ Best value is a challenging framework that is designed to improve local services. Councils are required to assess their own performance and put in place measures to ensure continuous improvement in all of their services.

Councils must show that they have applied the 4Cs of best value:

- ◆ **challenging** why and how a service is being provided;
- ◆ **comparing** their performance with others' (including organisations in the private and voluntary sectors);
- ◆ embracing fair **competition** as a means of securing efficient and effective services; and
- ◆ **consulting** local **taxpayers**, customers and the wider business community.

The Government has decided that each council should be scrutinised by an independent inspectorate. The Audit Commission performs this role.

The purpose of the inspection, and of this report, is to:

- ◆ enable the public to see whether best value is being delivered;
- ◆ enable the Council to see how well it is doing;
- ◆ enable the Government to see how well its policies are working in practice;
- ◆ identify failing services where remedial action may be necessary; and
- ◆ identify and disseminate best practice.

¹ This report has been prepared by the Audit Commission ('the Commission') following an inspection under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, and issued in accordance with its duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

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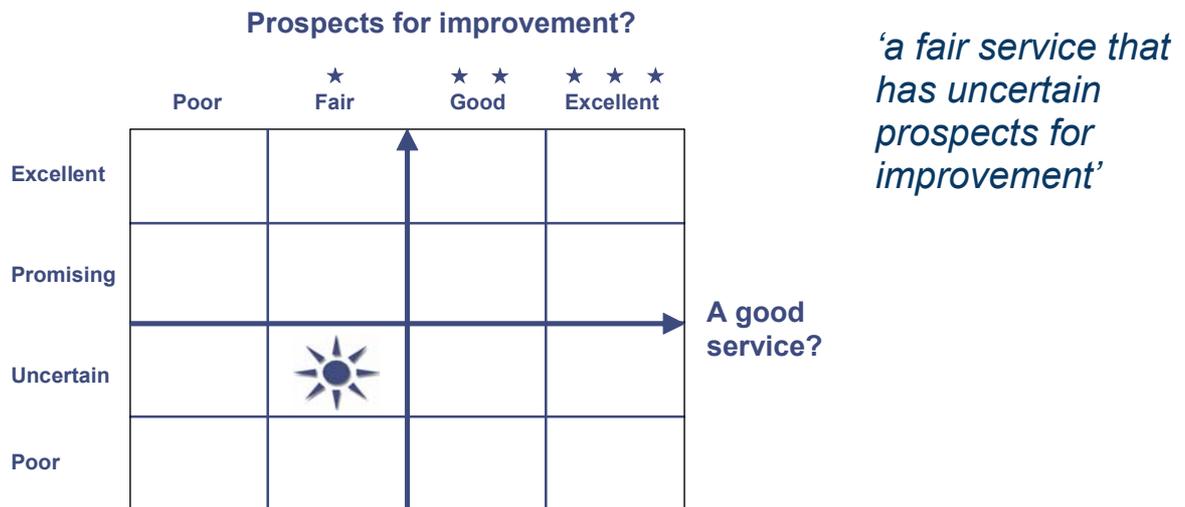
Summary

- 1 The Borough of Trafford is an economic driver for Greater Manchester. It occupies the south west segment of the conurbation and spans a wide range of settlements from inner city high-density terraces through some of Manchester's most affluent suburbs to its rural fringes. Living in the Borough is associated with high incomes, above average standards of education and what residents regard as an enviable quality of life. The legacy of the world's first industrial estate, Trafford Park, has continued in high rates of business start-up; both have given the area low unemployment rates and the most buoyant economy in Greater Manchester. The Council has contributed to this economic growth through actions such as supporting the creation of jobs and local people's access to them.
- 2 The overall prosperity conceals some large local discrepancies in standard of living, with most regeneration action focused on the areas of Old Trafford in the north of the Borough and Partington in the south west. Though both have improved in recent years, they are not catching up with the borough average, and the Council's commitment to reducing the disparity in the future is unclear.
- 3 More generally, the Council currently lacks a clear strategy for economic regeneration, though it recognises that the economy is unlikely to continue to prosper in an increasingly competitive environment without strong support from its staff and those of partners.
- 4 Both the political and the operational direction of the Council have changed within the last year. The incoming council has articulated some of its guiding principles – for example a strong emphasis on regenerating town centres - but they are only gradually being incorporated into detailed plans, and not all the senior managers required to implement them are yet in post.
- 5 The Council has carried out an honest and wide-ranging best value review of economic regeneration that identifies many of the key issues, but there remain doubts about the capacity in staff and funding to carry out the improvements that result from this analysis. Some positive changes such as more active involvement in Greater Manchester's economic policy-making, place extra demands on staff.
- 6 Operationally, the Council is making progress. It is revising its structure and encouraging greater collaborative working across departments. It is also paying greater attention to setting out clear goals and to measuring its performance towards those goals.

Scoring the service

- 7 We have assessed the Council as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Scoring chart²: Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council - Economic Regeneration



- 8 Regeneration activity is fair because:
- ◆ the Council is taking a more outward facing approach to economic regeneration issues and is building positive relationships with organisations in the Borough and in the sub-region;
 - ◆ the Council has a broad understanding of the economic regeneration issues facing it and has consciously taken an enabling role;
 - ◆ Trafford has a very strong economy and the Council has made a positive contribution to that; and
 - ◆ the service effectively delivers regeneration programmes in deprived areas.
- 9 However there are significant weaknesses:
- ◆ the Council lacks clear ambitions, aims or a strategy for economic regeneration;
 - ◆ the economic intelligence on which plans should be based is only partly available;
 - ◆ some issues that might constrain the economy in the future, including skills, land and property shortages and infrastructure capacity, have not been addressed;
 - ◆ the gap between the most deprived areas and the rest of the Borough has not closed;

² 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.

- ◆ the Council has not taken a comprehensive, corporate approach to disadvantaged communities and its engagement with residents has been limited; and
 - ◆ Trafford's governance arrangements for regeneration are weak compared with those of successful councils.
- 10 The prospects for improvement are uncertain, although there are some positive signs that the Council is addressing the issues:
- ◆ the best value review was a sound, challenging examination of the Council's economic development activity, which identified some major issues that need addressing;
 - ◆ the service has drawn up an improvement plan to comprehensively address these issues, which has been risk assessed to ensure it is deliverable, and if implemented should lead to significant improvement;
 - ◆ the Council is aware of the problems it faces and is emphasising the need to manage performance;
 - ◆ the Council's political and managerial leadership is actively strengthening relations with partners; and
 - ◆ the service has a generally good track record of delivering on its work programmes.
- 11 However there are significant uncertainties over delivery of improvement:
- ◆ there is no clear brief as to what the objectives and coverage of the economic development plan should be or how it will be monitored and reviewed to ensure it remains relevant;
 - ◆ important proposals in the improvement plan for building on the work with local partnerships and mainstreaming economic regeneration have been scaled back as a result of the risk assessment;
 - ◆ the service has been subject to frequent changes of responsibilities and of structure and so some actions in service plans have slipped;
 - ◆ the tasks in the improvement plan are complex, politically significant and involve external partners; lack of clarity as to priorities or additional work load will make delivery of the action plan very difficult;
 - ◆ the capacity of the service is limited by the small number of staff and by the budget;
 - ◆ the Council does not have a corporate strategy to take advantage of all the potential resources available and take advantage of the economic buoyancy of Trafford for the benefit of disadvantaged areas; and
 - ◆ the corporate performance management system has become more focused on delivery but corrective actions are as yet untested and the service lacks the tools to judge its impact on the wider economy of the Borough.

Recommendations

- 12 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council:
- ◆ agree, with its partners, more specific aims and priorities for economic regeneration as a basis for the preparation of the economic development plan;
 - ◆ agree, with its partners, how the economic development plan will be communicated to all residents and other stakeholders and be kept under review;
 - ◆ agree a broader set of performance indicators for economic regeneration, which reflect all its aims, and a set of subsidiary indicators that will enable it to track progress towards those aims;
 - ◆ take a more explicit approach to mainstreaming economic regeneration activity by reviewing all the resources available to it over the medium-term and establishing clear policies and programmes for their use; and
 - ◆ establish the principles for its relationships with local neighbourhood partnerships taking account of the capacity of each partnership and intractability of issues it faces.
- 13 We would like to thank the staff of Trafford Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

Context

- 14 This report has been prepared by the Audit Commission (the Commission) following an inspection under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, and issued in accordance with its duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

The locality

- 15 Trafford Metropolitan Borough is in Greater Manchester. The Borough's population is 211,800, living in 89,300 households, and 8.3 per cent of the population are from black and minority ethnic communities. The age distribution of the population is similar to the national average.
- 16 Trafford has the most buoyant economy in Greater Manchester and has the greatest number of businesses and jobs per head, the most skilled workforce and the highest wage levels. It provides 40,000 more jobs than required by its own residents, and is a net importer of labour. The proportion of the working population in work is 75.1 per cent, higher than the averages for the north west (72.8 per cent) and Great Britain (74.3 per cent). The rate of unemployment is 1.7 per cent compared to the North West average of 2.5 per cent and the Great Britain average of 2.4 per cent. Most people (83 per cent) work in service industries but manufacturing, despite a substantial fall in the number of people employed, is still very important to Trafford and provides 12 per cent of all jobs. The economic buoyancy is partly because of its large business zones, particularly Trafford Park, one of the largest business parks in Europe, which received major investment in the 1980s and 1990s through a Development Corporation. The economic success is also attributed to the excellent road, air and metro communications, spin-out of new businesses from existing ones, quality of higher and further education, educational attainment of residents, diversity of people and environmental quality.
- 17 Despite the overall prosperity, there are two wards, Bucklow in the west of the Borough and Clifford in the north, in the 10 per cent most deprived in England and other smaller parts of the Borough also suffer from high levels of deprivation.

The Council

- 18 The Council comprises 63 councillors. The Conservative Party, with 40 councillors, took control of the Council in June 2004. Currently a cabinet style executive governs the business of the Council. A new chief executive has been appointed and will take up the post in June 2005.
- 19 The Council's net revenue budget for the year 2004/05 was £224 million and current projections indicate that income and expenditure was controlled within the budget.
- 20 The Council's corporate aims have been agreed in its corporate plan for 2005 to 2008, following political changes in the last year. The executive agreed seven immediate priorities for 2004/05, of which four were to deliver outcomes for the community of:
- ◆ crime reduction;
 - ◆ education;
 - ◆ town centre regeneration; and
 - ◆ improvements to highways and pavements.

- 21 Three priorities focused on internal corporate matters:
- ◆ improving the Council's comprehensive performance rating;
 - ◆ financial management; and
 - ◆ human resources.
- 22 The Council's medium-term commitments, as listed in the corporate plan, are:
- ◆ to increase the safety of individuals and communities;
 - ◆ to improve care, support and health outcomes for vulnerable adults, older people and informal carers;
 - ◆ to improve access, timeliness and standards of customer service;
 - ◆ to improve awareness of Trafford as a place to live, work and visit;
 - ◆ to support local business and regeneration;
 - ◆ to improve access to skills development for the world of work;
 - ◆ to improve outcomes for all children and young people;
 - ◆ to improve the cleanliness and sustainability of the local environment;
 - ◆ to support diversity and promote equal access to facilities;
 - ◆ to improve access to sports, arts and leisure facilities; and
 - ◆ to improve use of available resources (time, staff, money, premises).

The Council's best value review

- 23 The activities under review consist of economic development, tourism, policy and partnerships, area regeneration, neighbourhood renewal and procuring resources. These activities are provided by the Regeneration, Economic Development, Policy and Partnerships service, which acts primarily as an enabler, and are the responsibility of the executive member for Economic Development and Asset Management. Trafford helped establish the various joint working arrangements for economic development that led to the establishment of Manchester Enterprises, which now provides economic development services across the whole of Greater Manchester.
- 24 The net budget for the service for 2005/06 is £1,236,327, a rise of 5.7 per cent from the previous year.
- 25 The priorities of the service, listed in the draft service plan for 2005 to 2008, are to:
- ◆ support the Trafford Partnership to deliver the Community Strategy to make Trafford a great place to live, learn, work and relax;
 - ◆ deliver the Trafford Economic Development Plan with the Trafford Economic Alliance to maximise investment and opportunities in the Borough for local businesses and residents;
 - ◆ increase investment and improve service delivery in Trafford's major town centres;
 - ◆ promote community cohesion, ensure fair access for all and reduce discrimination; and
 - ◆ promote sustainable communities and strive to make all Trafford's neighbourhoods places where people want to live and choose to stay.

- 26 The Council carried out a best value review of the service in 2004/05. The review concluded that:
- ◆ policy frameworks were missing;
 - ◆ policy foresighting³ needed to be strengthened;
 - ◆ economic intelligence needed to be improved;
 - ◆ the LSP sub-group for economic regeneration issues needed to become more focused;
 - ◆ relationship building with partners in the sub-region needed to be strengthened;
 - ◆ work with local partnerships needed to be strengthened; and
 - ◆ regeneration activity needed to be mainstreamed.
- 27 An improvement plan has been drawn up to address these issues and accepted in principle by the executive member.

³ The council uses the term policy foresighting to mean organisational anticipation of emerging issues and policies that could affect the organisation's ability to achieve its aims.

How good is the service?

Are the aims clear and challenging?

- 28 Inspectors look to see how a council has agreed the key aims for the service being inspected, how clear these aims are to the people that receive the service and whether these reflect the corporate aims of the organisation as a whole.
- 29 Aims need to be challenging, address local needs and support national objectives. This requires the Council to consider and demonstrate how a service contributes to its wider corporate aims and community plans.
- 30 The Council does not have a clear vision for Trafford's economic future. Trafford lacks an economic development plan and relies on the Greater Manchester Economic Development Plan as a framework for economic regeneration, despite Trafford's key role in the Greater Manchester economy, its need to remain competitive and its own issues of disadvantage. The service plan guides local regeneration but is only partly aligned with the corporate plan and community strategy. The Council is clear that economic regeneration must be sustainable but lacks a corporate approach to achieve this. The Council recognises its responsibilities to address regeneration issues and has started a debate with partners on what the vision might be. It is taking an active role in sub-regional partnerships, in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and in its economic development sub-group, the Economic Alliance, and has helped the reform of these partnerships. A draft economic assessment of Trafford has been produced, which is useful in taking forward the debate but does not fill all the gaps in the Council's information about the local economy and effectiveness of policy interventions. Partners, communities and businesses have been widely consulted but are still not clear as to the Council's aims and priorities for Trafford's economic future.
- 31 The rationale for the Council's economic regeneration activity is not clear. The Council has not set out how it wants Trafford's economy to develop and relate to Greater Manchester's or how development can benefit the deprived parts of the Borough. The corporate plan recognises that Trafford, though an attractive place to live and carry out business, is in competition with other areas and requires continued efforts to maintain its economic buoyancy. It identifies the disparity between prosperous and deprived areas as a threat to social cohesion. However, economic regeneration has had a low profile in the Council and the only short-term corporate priority is to improve the town centres. This is starting to change. The corporate plan identifies business development, economic regeneration, skills development and improving awareness of Trafford as medium-term priorities and these align with community strategy priorities. But the actions to deliver them are limited to promoting town centres, helping businesses procure from the Council, producing an economic development plan, with the Economic Alliance, and producing a Trafford marketing and communications strategy. The lack of priority to addressing the issues of competitiveness and low economic activity in deprived areas leaves resources underutilised and puts Trafford's long-term economy at risk.

- 32 The lack of an economic development plan to address Trafford's issues is a weakness and leaves the agencies involved unclear as to the aims and their delivery roles. In the absence of an economic development plan for Trafford, the Council has to rely on the North West Regional Economic Strategy and the Greater Manchester Economic Development Plan to guide its economic regeneration work. They set out generic guidance and programmes for the whole conurbation and identify strategic sites of which two are in Trafford – Davenport Green and Carrington. An employment, skills and jobs framework, agreed in 2003, identified labour force issues and possible initiatives to address them, but lacked an action plan. The Council reviewed the Trafford Unitary Development Plan, which covers land use issues, and produced draft physical regeneration frameworks for Partington and the ship canal corridor. But the Council cannot adopt the frameworks until outstanding issues, affecting one of the regional strategic sites and the canal corridor, are resolved. There are neighbourhood regeneration programmes for use of external funds in the most deprived parts of the Borough – Old Trafford, Gorse Hill and Partington – but no overall neighbourhood renewal strategy for how the Council will address disadvantage, provide the links between neighbourhood-based activity and borough-wide activity or prioritise between parts of the Borough.
- 33 The draft service improvement plan for economic development, policy and partnerships takes account of the Greater Manchester Economic Development Plan but is only partly aligned to the community strategy and corporate plan and has some inconsistencies with them. The service plan priority to 'promote sustainable communities and strive to make all Trafford's neighbourhoods places where people want to live and choose to stay' does not align directly with the corporate priorities. The service plan does not refer to the corporate priority of improving health outcomes, a key issue in disadvantaged parts of Trafford. The service plan sets high level targets for investment enquiries, investments attracted, new businesses set up, increase in jobs and pedestrian movement in town centres and at the Imperial War Museum. There are no targets for the priorities of maximising opportunities for residents, promoting community cohesion or promoting sustainable communities. The service improvement plan only identifies new activities. It does not set timescales and targets for ongoing work, though much of the delivery of externally-funded projects and programmes has targets set by the providers of those funds.
- 34 The Council does not have an integrated approach to economic regeneration and so does not address the interconnection of environmental, social and economic aspects of regeneration. Other services are not clear as to how their work might contribute to the economic regeneration of the Borough and so do not consider the economic impacts and opportunities of their work or build them into their own service plans. The asset management plan proposes that future disposal of surplus property will take account of corporate objectives, including regeneration, but no forward programme has been agreed.
- 35 The Council is clear that its future approach to economic regeneration must be sustainable. It has adopted a sustainability charter, has an officer leading on sustainability and has assessed the sustainability of LSP thematic partnerships' work. The priority to town centres is consistent with the Government's sustainable development strategy and could help reduce the extensive movement consequent on the present economic and transport patterns in Greater Manchester and beyond. The Council's economic regeneration aims are too general to be assessed for their consistency with sustainable development principles but unless economic, environmental and social aspects of regeneration are integrated on a long-term basis they will not be sustainable.

- 36 The Council recognises the need to engage and build relationships with partners in the Borough and sub-region. It is taking a more outward facing role in regional and sub-regional partnerships such as the Greater Manchester Forum and the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA). It is working with partners on the Trafford Partnership and Economic Alliance and has supported reform of these, including the move of chairmanship of these bodies to the private sector. Local and regional stakeholders realise the importance of Trafford to the Greater Manchester economy, the range of opportunities in Trafford to further strengthen the economy but also the need to address deprivation within Trafford.
- 37 The economic regeneration service consulted stakeholders and interest groups on what should be its economic regeneration aims and the groups think their views are being taken into account. Some individuals and businesses are concerned that their views are only heard through representational groups and that they could be excluded from strategy formulation; but many stakeholders think that the Council is listening and does have good connections to the business community through representative groups. The Council is getting directly involved with groups where individual businesses are present, such as Manchester Enterprise's employer engagement unit, and the Chambers of Commerce. It has used consultation on town centre developments as a useful way of engaging communities, for example, a series of staffed displays in Urmston town centre attracted 3,000 comments.
- 38 As a first step to producing an economic development plan the service, with the Economic Alliance, has produced a draft economic assessment of the Borough to stimulate debate inside and outside the Council as to Trafford's future role. This complements the economic assessment of the sub-region produced by Manchester Enterprises. The assessment gives an overview of the Trafford economy in terms of changing numbers of businesses and jobs, town centres viability, tourism offer and quality of infrastructure. It identifies some of the issues facing the economy, including skills shortages, weak links to Manchester's universities, weak public transport links to some of the major centres of employment, lack of infrastructure for business formation, growth and major new investment, unbalanced demand in the housing market and inequalities and deprivation in parts of the Borough.
- 39 However the assessment of Trafford's economy does not analyse:
- ◆ the reasons for the success of the Trafford economy or how the Trafford economy relates to the wider Greater Manchester economy;
 - ◆ what might affect the local economy in the future;
 - ◆ the detailed sectoral trends in the economy and the opportunities and threats to the local economy that may result;
 - ◆ the physical opportunities and constraints for development;
 - ◆ the social and economic circumstances of different neighbourhoods and communities or how these are changing;
 - ◆ the barriers to employment faced by disadvantaged groups; and
 - ◆ whether the outputs from individual local initiatives are having an impact or are contributing to broader outcomes.
- 40 This reflects the lack of analytical capacity in the Council. The Council has extensive social and economic data, largely drawn from standard, national data sets, but it is dispersed across the Council. Limited use is made of it to understand or forecast change or to design and monitor interventions in the economy or labour market. Information is not regularly reported to councillors.

- 41 Though the Council and Economic Alliance are working towards an economic development plan, the principles on which the plan should be based are not agreed and this could make it difficult for officers and for the Council's partners to make progress. The Council is clear that its role is as an enabler and that most economic development services will be delivered by others. The current assumption is that the Trafford economic development plan will follow the structure of the Greater Manchester Economic Development Plan. However partners and residents are still not clear as to the Council's vision, aims and priorities.

Does the service meet these aims?

- 42 Having considered the aims that the Council set for the service, inspectors make an assessment of how well the Council is meeting these aims. This includes an assessment of performance against specific service standards and targets and the Council's approach to measuring whether it actually delivers what it set out to do.

Overview

- 43 The service's broad targets for economic growth are being achieved. Trafford has the highest rate of business formation in Greater Manchester, growing numbers of jobs, increasing investment enquiries and increasing visitors to its tourist attractions. Indicators of town centre vitality give a more mixed picture, but rental levels for prime shops are increasing. The Council's contribution to this dynamism is useful but limited. It acts primarily as an enabler and Manchester Enterprises provides most economic development services. The Council promotes town centre development and tourism and liaises with businesses seeking help. It attempts to spread the benefits of the strong economy to disadvantaged communities by targeted services. These services are well-managed, achieve their targets but overall the Council has had modest impact in spreading economic success across Trafford and reducing the gap between the most disadvantaged communities and the rest of the Borough. It has done little to address emerging issues affecting the local economy of skills shortages, property shortages, infrastructure and transport barriers. Despite the emphasis on town centres and tourism, there are no urban design frameworks for key parts of the Borough and there is an imbalance in housing demand between the affluent south and the more deprived north and west of Trafford. Engagement between local people and the Council on regeneration issues is limited. Some individually admirable projects and activities have been delivered but are not part of an overall strategy and the Council has not co-ordinated delivery of its own, or other agencies, services in disadvantaged areas.

Achievement of outcomes

- 44 The Council makes a positive but modest contribution to Trafford's prosperity. The Council takes an enabling role in economic regeneration and only provides direct services where Manchester Enterprises does not provide them, primarily in town centres or for direct liaison with the tourist attractions, or where the Council can provide a complementary local function, such a first point of call for businesses wanting assistance. However, Manchester Enterprises is less active in Trafford than in other boroughs because of the lack of regeneration funding for its work. Where the Council does intervene to provide services it adds value and its economic development and regeneration activities have achieved their targets.

The local labour market

- 45 The Council has contributed to the increasing number of local jobs and to helping local people access them. When large developments are planned and businesses move into or relocate in Trafford it negotiates local labour agreements so when businesses recruit they give priority to local people and training providers offer courses tailored to the business's requirements. An example is the Imperial War Museum, where a volunteer programme assists local people to work at the museum and some have moved on to become assessors and train-up further recruits. Three community-based job shops are situated in the most deprived neighbourhoods to make local people aware of the job and training opportunities and help them into education, training and jobs. In Partington 500 local adults improved their skills through the Learning Gateway, which in 2003/04 led 233 people into jobs and 160 more into education. This is significant when the total number of people unemployed in the Borough is 2,500.
- 46 The Council has helped local people access jobs but the various programmes operated by the Council and its partners are not, in businesses' view, dealing with the skills gap. Local businesses have difficulty in recruiting and are concerned that they cannot find people with suitable skills. A further concern for businesses trying to recruit, and for people trying to access work, is the poor public transport links to major centres of employment, such as Trafford Park. The Council is now working with the Passenger Transport Authority on a study of transport links between disadvantaged areas and Trafford Park.

Business growth

- 47 The Council has contributed to business growth by ensuring local people wanting to establish new businesses in disadvantaged areas are supported. For example, a Women into Business programme enabled 12 women returners from Old Trafford and Gorse Hill to set up in business, return to employment or go onto further vocational training. A business support package for young, potential entrepreneurs in Old Trafford assisted 9 business starts. Overall, in 2003/04, 107 new businesses received support creating 140 new jobs and 29 people gained an NVQ3 qualification in small business start-up. The Council encourages social enterprises of which a successful example is the Partington and Cadishead Cooperative Transport. It offers help to existing businesses when they want, or have, to relocate. For example the service liaised with businesses affected by the expansion of the Metro and ensured that all of them found alternative premises. The Council has a small fund of £30,000 available to grant aid businesses. It has links to the major universities of Manchester through the Manchester Knowledge Capital network and the Regional Manufacturing Centre in Trafford to encourage spin out of innovative ideas into the local economy.
- 48 However, though the Council is contributing to a growth in businesses and is helping people from disadvantaged communities to set up businesses, it is not systematically encouraging innovation, supply chain development or addressing barriers to business start-up and expansion. It is not using its own procurement processes to help business development, including social enterprises. An increasing concern of small businesses, and the agencies helping them, is the lack of suitable incubator premises for start-ups and larger premises for expanding businesses. The Council's contribution to business growth is modest when compared to the total number of businesses that set up every year and it is not maximising the opportunities in Trafford.

Tourism

- 49 Trafford has a successful marketing partnership with Salford Council and the major tourist attractions to promote the whole Quays package. As well as marketing the existing product, the Council is working with the attractions to improve the offer. The Council has assisted Lancashire County Cricket Club to ensure that it stays in Trafford and has worked with Manchester United on plans to expand its stadium. The initiatives have resulted in tourism revenue increasing by an estimated 40 per cent over the last five years.
- 50 However, whilst the tourist attractions are individually impressive and coherently marketed, the physical connections between the attractions are not clear or attractive for visitors and the ancillary facilities, such as shops, cafes, restaurants and hotels, are lacking. The Council does not have a development framework for enhancing the visitor experience of the attractions and the area around them.

Town centre development

- 51 Town centre development is a priority for the Council and the service is actively working with traders, property owners and other council services in marketing the centres and bringing forward improvement proposals. It consults extensively with traders and residents. In Sale town centre the Council, by rationalising its own use of property, was able to release development sites and refurbish and redevelop the sites it retained. The resultant scheme, Sale Waterside, won the British Urban Regeneration Association award for regeneration. The outcomes were private sector investment in the shopping centre, better links between the parts of the shopping centre, an enhanced environment in and around it, increased use of local facilities including the library, Council one-stop shop and local theatre and gallery, and increased local employment. Shopping centre rents and yields have improved, though these cannot be attributed solely to the Waterside development.
- 52 In Altrincham the Council is promoting development, rationalising its own use of property and addressing car parking issues. At Urmston it is promoting redevelopment of the existing shopping centre, which it owns, and has consulted extensively with local residents on the sort of scheme that they wish to see. Other local facilities such as the library and Council one-stop shop will be relocated to better relate to the shopping centre. At Partington the district centre is run down and the Council and partners are investing in new community facilities, including a recently opened healthy living centre. The Council is discussing possible schemes to refurbish and redevelop the shopping centre with its owner.
- 53 The town centres are easily accessible by public transport and could have a wider role than retailing, as sustainable employment centres, but the Council's initiatives to realise this have been limited, other than for its own accommodation and by encouraging local labour schemes. There are no urban design frameworks to encourage investment in these key parts of Trafford. Concerns over the quality of pedestrian environment, community safety and car parking could threaten their appeal as centres that draw people together and maintain cohesive communities.

Neighbourhood regeneration

- 54 Economic regeneration work is having a positive impact on the most disadvantaged communities, including improving local amenities and reducing levels of unemployment, but the gap between the disadvantaged areas and the rest of the Borough has hardly narrowed, and on some indicators has actually widened, over the life of the regeneration programmes.

- 55 The regeneration service has supported the regeneration partnerships in Old Trafford and Partington, set up to manage Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programmes. It helped them obtain European and other funding for projects to improve local people's quality of life and to sustain their communities. The service helped the Partington partnership to address the problems of physical isolation from the rest of the Borough, poor transport links, poor access to services and poor health of the local community, all barriers to work and to wider social inclusion. A community transport co-operative has been established and a Health Park built in the town centre, including a new medical centre, a Healthy Living Centre to be managed by the Community Development Trust and a Sure Start Centre.
- 56 Youth unemployment in Old Trafford and Gorse Hill, which until very recently was among the highest in Greater Manchester, is now reducing. The SRB programme aims to create positive alternatives for young people, involve them at every stage and an outreach worker is based at the Old Trafford Job Shop to engage with young people and help them to better access services. As a result of these initiatives youth unemployment in Clifford ward fell from 4th worst in Greater Manchester in October 2002 (previously at 1st place) to 34th in October 2003.
- 57 The service's analysis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation has highlighted the problems of other smaller deprived neighbourhoods, where local people experience economic and social exclusion and a worse quality of life than the rest of the Borough. It has helped neighbourhood partnerships of local people and agencies ensure that service delivery is better targeted to local needs and secure extra resources, even though these areas have not been eligible for regeneration funding because of their relatively small scale and more affluent surroundings.
- 58 The Council has adopted supplementary planning guidance to address the imbalance in house building activity between the affluent south of the Borough, where demand is high, and the more deprived north and west, where the population has been falling. The drop in population, particularly in Partington, makes local facilities less viable and contributes to their decline. Regional policy restricts the amount of housing development in Trafford, so the Council aims to steer new housing to the areas where it will best contribute to regeneration and it is encouraging new housing developments, such as Stamford Brook, to use principles of sustainable development. Implementation of the policy in Partington has been delayed because of the problems over the Unitary Development Plan.
- 59 However, evaluation of the SRB programmes in 2003 and 2004 suggested that disadvantaged areas were not catching up with the rest of the Borough as:
- ◆ in Old Trafford, the gap had closed for income deprivation, car ownership and university entrance but had widened for crime and for unemployment and for primary school performance there was a mixed outcome; and
 - ◆ in Partington, the gap had closed for unauthorised school absence but had widened for house price, school performance and limiting long-term illness.

More recent statistics indicate a narrowing crime gap, particularly for Partington.

- 60 The Council has had limited engagement with local people. The evaluation of SRB programmes found that 68 per cent of people living in Old Trafford and 39 per cent of those in Partington had not heard of the Council's regeneration activity. The people who are aware of the Council and the programmes think they have had a positive, though small, impact. Residents and businesses that have benefited from economic development initiatives recognise the service's value to them. However, in the wider business and resident communities there is a concern that the Council could do more to help the local economy and disadvantaged areas and that it has tended to work through intermediaries rather than engage communities directly.
- 61 The Partington and Old Trafford partnerships have built local capacity. The work was slow to take off and has only reached a limited range of people but is now expanding. In Partington a Development Trust, run by local people, has been set up to carry on the work of the regeneration partnership after the SRB programme finishes. As the Trust builds its own capacity, then assets, including the healthy living centre, will be transferred to it so it can become self-sustaining. As communities in Old Trafford and Gorse Hill are more fragmented, a different model is being explored to continue regeneration there, using some form of partnership of local residents and the agencies operating in the area. Another opportunity for the diverse communities to enhance their capacity, communicate and gain media skills is the community internet TV channel, Lets Go Global.
- 62 The Council lacks a corporate, coordinated approach to economic regeneration, particularly to the most disadvantaged areas. Other services are aware of regeneration as an issue but are not clear as to the Council's aims and hence are not clear as to how they can contribute. However, some weak linkages such as between economic regeneration and skills development are being addressed by the Council, which chairs the Learning Partnership. Where the Council has taken a cross-service approach to regeneration it has had notable success, such as the Sale Waterside development. Here the regeneration service, property service, planning, transport and cultural services all worked together to achieve a very successful development.
- 63 The Council has not adopted a systematic approach to mainstreaming economic regeneration even though, because of Trafford's overall affluence, it has only limited access to external funding. It has not made full use of the economic buoyancy to pursue economic regeneration. The Council has made some use of the substantial development interest and high land values in the Borough to negotiate with developers opportunities for local people to obtain the jobs created. However, this has been on an opportunistic basis without a systematic policy framework to ensure that the value added by development has a positive impact on disadvantaged areas. However, even though the Borough is not eligible for most regeneration funding, the Council's resource procurement team has managed to attract an average of £400,000 per year into the Borough, relevant to the Council's aims and mostly for the benefit of disadvantaged areas.

Working in partnerships

- 64 The Council operates within a range of successful partnerships in the Borough and partners recognise that the Council's leadership can 'make things happen'. The Council constructively represents Trafford's economic needs on sub-regional and regional partnerships, though the amount of cross-district working to tackle mutual problems is limited. It has helped the LSP, which had been criticised as being dominated by the Council, to become more effective. The LSP has restructured its working groups to better fit with its priorities, ensure appropriate representation and allow the executive to concentrate where it can best add value. However, the LSP has not yet developed methods of bending resources towards deprived areas or altering policies to make them more appropriate to deprived areas.
- 65 The Council's role in contributing to neighbourhood partnerships, and helping the partnerships contribute to wider regeneration, is still developing and unclear. The service has capacity problems in attending and supporting partnerships and has prioritised Old Trafford, Partington and Sale West as the most needy areas but partnerships are not sure as to what they can expect from the Council. As most disadvantaged communities have deep seated problems that require sustained attention such uncertainties are not helpful.

How does the performance compare?

- 66 In order to judge the quality of a service, it is important to compare the performance of that service against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim is not exact comparison, but an exploration of how similar services (or elements of services) perform in order to identify significant differences, the reasons for them, and the extent to which improvements are required.
- 67 Trafford has a strong economy with employment, unemployment, skills' levels and business formation all improving. The Borough, as a whole, compares favourably with other Greater Manchester boroughs and with the country as a whole. However, two wards remain in the worst 10 per cent of wards in the country and, at a more detailed level of analysis, contain six Super Output Areas⁴ that are in the worst 10 per cent in the country. Another three Super Output Areas outside these wards are also in the worst 10 per cent in the country. Though there have been absolute improvements in these areas, their position relative to the rest of the Borough has not improved significantly. Trafford has some of the characteristics of successful core cities but, compared with councils showing good practice in economic regeneration, its governance arrangements have been weak, especially in its lack of strategic aims and in its lack of a corporate approach to its most deprived areas.

⁴ Super Output Areas are areas, smaller than wards, which are used for analysing and comparing census and similar spatial statistics.

- 68 Trafford had 75.1 per cent of its population in employment in 2003/04, a higher proportion than in the North West (72.8 per cent) or Great Britain (74.3 per cent) and unemployment, at 1.7 per cent, is lower than the North West (2.5 per cent) or Great Britain (2.4 per cent). Long-term unemployment is also relatively low with only 8.5 per cent of claimants having been out of work for over twelve months as compared to 12.2 per cent for the North West and 13.9 per cent for Great Britain. Average earnings are £483.40 per week, which is higher than for the North West (£440.10 per week) or Great Britain (£475.80 per week). Qualifications are higher than the regional or national averages with 31.1 per cent of the working age population having qualifications to NVQ 4 or above as compared to 23.1 per cent in the North West and 25.2 per cent in Great Britain.
- 69 Trafford has 1.1 jobs for every person of working age as compared to 0.8 for the North West and 0.8 for Great Britain. It has 37.3 businesses for every 1000 people as compared to the North West's 25.3 and Great Britain's 30.8. The rate of business formation is 17.0 per cent of the stock as compared to the North West rate of 10.9 per cent and the Great Britain rate of 10.6 per cent.
- 70 All this points to a buoyant economy but there are significant areas of deprivation in the Borough. Two wards, containing 8.5 per cent of Trafford's population, are in the worst 10 per cent of wards in the country for deprivation. The statistics available, though not comprehensive, suggest that the relative deprivation of these areas is not improving. For example, in Partington school, attainment and health are not catching up with the rest of Trafford. The proportion of secondary school pupils gaining five or more grade A to C GCSEs has remained static at 22 per cent for the last four years whilst that for Trafford has increased from 56 to 62 per cent and for England from 49 to 52 per cent. The proportion of people with a limiting long-term illness increased from 15.1 to 23.1 per cent from 1991 to 2001, whereas for Trafford it increased from 11.9 to 17.7 per cent and for England and Wales from 12.3 to 18.2 per cent. In Old Trafford, overall employment and educational attainment show signs of a narrowing gap but not claimant counts and crime levels.
- 71 Trafford has several of the characteristics of successful core cities, which have been identified⁵ as:
- ◆ economic diversity;
 - ◆ innovation in firms and organisations;
 - ◆ skilled workforce;
 - ◆ good connectivity – internal and external;
 - ◆ quality of life – social, cultural and environmental; and
 - ◆ good governance – strategic capacity to mobilise and implement long-term development strategies.

⁵ Parkinson, M. et al, Competitive European Cities: Where do the Core Cities Stand? ODPM 2004.

- 72 Where Trafford has been weak is in its governance, as comparing it with good practice of other councils demonstrates. The Audit Commission Learning from Inspection report⁶ identified that councils doing well on delivering economic regeneration:
- ◆ are clear about why they are involved and what they hope to achieve;
 - ◆ draw up a socio-economic profile and consult the community to develop an understanding of local needs;
 - ◆ add value within partnerships;
 - ◆ use economic development to tackle deprivation;
 - ◆ seek user feedback to inform their performance management;
 - ◆ have outcome-based aims, targets and performance indicators; and
 - ◆ collect evidence of step change improvements.
- 73 The Council's main weakness is that it has not set out clearly why it is involved in economic regeneration or what it hopes to achieve. Consequently it does not have corporate outcome-based aims, targets and performance indicators. The Council recognises this, has drawn up an assessment of the Borough and is consulting on the way forward. The Council has evaluated its existing regeneration programmes and is learning from good practice elsewhere. It is now more active in partnerships, is adding value to them but still does not take a consistent role in local partnerships. The Council uses economic development to tackle deprivation but its impact has been limited and it has not taken a corporate approach to making best use of its resources and leverage to benefit disadvantaged areas. Because the Council has not set out what outcomes it wants from the resources it invests in economic regeneration, it is not in a position to assess whether the economic regeneration service as a whole provides value for money compared with other councils, though it has assessed the value for money of parts of the service such as resource procurement. This is a weakness as the Council has expressed concern at its lack of resources for economic regeneration.

Summary

- 74 The Council lacks clear ambitions, aims or a strategy for economic regeneration. Its stated priorities are to support local businesses and regeneration, improve access to skills development for work and improve awareness of Trafford as a place to live, work and visit. However, delivering on these priorities depends on having an economic development plan, a communications and marketing strategy and an employment skills and jobs framework for Trafford, of which only the last is in place. The economic intelligence on which they should be based is only partly available. The lack of priority to maintaining Trafford's competitiveness and increasing economic activity in deprived areas does not make best use of Trafford's resources and puts its long-term economy at risk.
- 75 The Council is taking a more outward facing approach to economic regeneration and is building positive relationships with organisations in Trafford and sub-region. Partners welcome this and the LSP and Economic Alliance have reshaped to better address issues facing Trafford, including having private sector chairs. However, partners are still unclear as to what the Council wants to achieve.

⁶ Learning From Inspection, Economic and Community Regeneration, Audit Commission, 2003.

- 76 The Council takes an enabling role on economic regeneration. It only delivers services directly where other agencies cannot provide them. Businesses are satisfied with this approach and collaborative working has helped local people into work, helped small businesses establish, increased investment in town centres and contributed to more tourists visiting the Borough. Overall, Trafford has a strong economy and, whilst this is primarily because of factors outside the Council's influence, the Council's role has been positive. However, issues that might constrain the economy in the future, including skills, land and property shortages and infrastructure capacity, are not being addressed.
- 77 Parts of the Borough suffer from high levels of deprivation. The Council has helped improve some aspects of their residents' quality of life but the gap between these areas and the rest of the Borough has not closed. The Council has limited engagement with residents in these communities and it has not taken a comprehensive, corporate and long-term approach to them, or encouraged its partners on the LSP to take such an approach.
- 78 Trafford's overall economic performance compares favourably with most local authority areas in England but, despite this, two wards remain in the 10 per cent of most deprived wards in the country and there are few signs of this changing. Trafford has several of the attributes of successful cities, its main weakness being governance arrangements and, compared with councils successful at regeneration, it lacks a rationale for its activity or understanding of its value for money.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

Does the best value review drive improvements?

- 79 The best value review (BVR) is one of the mechanisms for ensuring that councils deliver continuous improvement to the services they provide.
- 80 The best value review provides a good basis for improving the service, having fundamentally challenged the Council's approach to economic regeneration. It was well-scoped to focus on high level, strategic issues rather than service delivery details. The review team was strong, drawn from inside and outside the Council, and included 'critical friends' from other economic regeneration services. The team consulted and compared widely and appropriately, looked at various models of delivery and, on the basis of this sound analysis, concluded that radical change in Trafford's existing approach was required to strengthen the Council's strategic vision, leadership and partnership working. The only issue that the review did not come to any conclusions on was the service's value for money.
- 81 The review was well-scoped to assess Trafford's approach to creating a thriving economy and cohesive community. The scope included all the Council economic development activities relevant to regenerating the local economy and improving the economic opportunities for local people. The review considered how services work together to support economic regeneration and how economic regeneration could be mainstreamed as part of the Council's regular business.
- 82 The review effectively addressed strategic issues about how the Council tackles economic regeneration rather than the details of specific topics. As a result, it concentrated on issues of governance, focused on the Council's enabling role and kept an overview that enabled the work to be completed and an improvement plan to be produced within the intended timescale.
- 83 The review team was a strong group including councillors, staff from related service areas, economic regeneration officers from other councils, sub-regional partnerships and the regional development agency and representatives from the community and business sectors. This broad mix of stakeholders challenged how the Council works and ensured that the review addressed fundamental issues.
- 84 The review appropriately compared the Council's approach to regeneration and effectiveness of its services with that of other councils having similar circumstances to Trafford or showing good practice in economic regeneration. The review team found that, compared to similar councils, the Council was not good at foresighting or using economic intelligence, needed to clarify its role in local partnerships, needed to establish a corporate approach to mainstreaming regeneration activity and needed to encourage the LSP economic sub-group to streamline. The team used this information to develop ideas for change that would increase the Council's impact. The review examined the level of resources put into the service compared with other councils, but was unable to conclude on its value for money, though the review identified lack of resources as a problem for the service.
- 85 A wide range of stakeholders were consulted on economic regeneration priorities and on the Council's performance. The review team honestly reported and addressed their critical comments on the Council's performance, its dominance of the LSP, lack of constructive leadership, lack of participation in sub-regional and regional forums and lack of ambition or strategy for economic regeneration.
- 86 Generally the review identified the issues that partners and stakeholders think important, these being that the Council should show leadership and take a higher profile in tackling some important economic regeneration issues that need to be addressed and on which only the Council can provide the necessary leadership.

- 87 The review concluded that the Council's emphasis on its strategic role is correct. It endorsed the Council's approach of taking an enabling role in economic regeneration and only delivering services directly in the rare instances where it is best placed to do so and where no other provider is available, such as town centre development, or if the Council has to be involved for strategic reasons, such as on sub-regional partnerships. The review concluded that the lack of strategy, foresighting and information make it difficult for the Council to be effective. However the review did not address the service's use of resources, despite identifying the need to mainstream activity.
- 88 The review team soundly analysed the information from consultation and comparison and made clear proposals for change in:
- ◆ the leadership and partnership role of the Council on economic regeneration;
 - ◆ the economic development activities the Council itself is best placed to undertake, especially economic intelligence, strategy and enabling; and
 - ◆ how the management and delivery of these activities could be improved and mainstreamed to achieve better outcomes.

How good is the improvement plan?

- 89 A best value review should result in an improvement plan that sets out what needs to improve, why, and how that improvement will be delivered. It should contain targets that are not only challenging but are also designed to demonstrate and ensure the continuous improvement.
- 90 The improvement plan comprehensively addresses the issues raised by the review. Ambitious proposals, if implemented, should lead to significant improvement in the effectiveness of economic regeneration in Trafford. The plan has been risk-assessed; actions are timetabled, their outcomes identified and responsibilities allocated. Some actions have already been completed, have had positive results and have been welcomed by partners. However, others are to produce further plans, but without clarity as to what the plans should cover or how they should be reviewed and kept up-to-date. Some significant actions to work with local partnerships and mainstream economic regeneration were proposed but then dropped, following the risk assessment, because of concern at lack of resources to implement them. Their absence from the improvement plan could slow progress and Trafford could lose opportunities for creatively building on the strengths of the Borough and making best use of all the resources available.
- 91 The improvement plan is ambitious in its scope and range. It comprehensively addresses the themes that the review identified as requiring change: putting missing strategy documents in place, improving economic intelligence and foresighting, improving partnership working at all scales from neighbourhood to regional levels and mainstreaming economic regeneration activity in the Council's and partner organisations' business. The plan sets out timetables, responsibilities and the expected outcomes from actions and assesses the political, financial and dependency risks to achieving them. The plan aims to complete all the actions over the next two years.
- 92 Some important actions have already been achieved. The economic assessment of the district has been produced. The LSP and Economic Alliance have been reformed and now have private sector chairs. Council representatives regularly attend regional and sub-regional meetings and the leader and chief executive of the Council are kept briefed on economic development issues. A business consultation group has been set up. Partners and other stakeholders are positive that these changes have strengthened relationships.

- 93 The improvement plan addresses the missing links in the strategic framework by proposing the preparation of additional plans, particularly an economic development plan. The first step, preparing the economic assessment, has been completed. However, the improvement plan does not provide an overarching vision for economic regeneration or clear briefs or objectives for the plans. For example, it does not indicate whether the Council wants to encourage further economic growth in Trafford or focus economic benefits on disadvantaged communities. Trafford has opportunities to build on its significant economic strengths, including its strategic sites, its town centres, its tourist venues and its entrepreneurial people. But, unless the Council provides long-term leadership and a clear, succinct statement of its intentions for these opportunities, officers and other agencies will find it difficult to work on the economic development plan and coordinate action by the Council and its partners to take it forward. The improvement plan does not address how the economic development plan, and other plans, will be corporately delivered, communicated to the rest of the Council and to partners, monitored and reviewed to keep them up-to-date and relevant.
- 94 Though the improvement plan proposes that the Council should clarify its role as partner and enabler in local partnerships, actions for a capacity building programme and to strengthen the Council's role in facilitating the work of the partnerships have been dropped. Without these actions local partnerships are unlikely to develop sufficiently to play a full role in regeneration. The improvement plan does not indicate how the Council's role might develop or on what criteria it might decide its future role. Rather it relies on the preparation of a neighbourhood renewal strategy to do this, progress on which has slipped. The Council has made progress by carrying out an audit of its activity in local partnerships, has had discussions with other partners, including housing associations and the Primary Care Trusts and has indicated which partnerships will be given priority.
- 95 Similarly, the improvement plan proposes that regeneration be mainstreamed but the actions are limited and do not address how the Council will mainstream regeneration activity. Proposals for the Council to adopt a clear policy towards mainstreaming regeneration activity, to identify expenditure in local areas and to strategically review that expenditure have been dropped. Although the Council has emphasised its lack of resources to address disadvantage, in absolute terms the Borough has substantial resources but the improvement plan does not propose how such resources might best be deployed. Again preparation of the economic development plan and neighbourhood renewal strategy will be difficult without a clear idea of how the Council intends to deploy resources in a corporate, coordinated way. The LSP has accepted that it has some responsibility for dealing with the issue and has set as one of its priorities to improve quality of life, regenerate neighbourhoods and maximize funding resources for deprived areas. The Council and partners have made some progress in focusing resources on specific neighbourhoods through the crime and disorder partnership and through Area Boards influencing standards of environmental work.

Will the Council deliver the improvements?

- 96 Inspectors look for evidence that a council will deliver what it has set out in the improvement plan. We look for a track record of managing change within the Council and, ideally, within the service itself. The plan should also have sufficient support from councillors, management, staff, service users and other stakeholders, particularly those responsible for delivery.

- 97 The Council, both politically and amongst senior managers, is aware of the problems it faces, is focused on delivering on its priorities and is determined to create a performance management culture throughout the organisation. The leader, portfolio holder and economic regeneration managers have taken a lead in strengthening relations with key economic regeneration partners, who are becoming more confident that the Council will deliver improvement. However, the Council's own priorities for economic regeneration remain unclear in the absence of a strategic framework. The capacity of the service is limited. It has a good track record of delivering projects and programmes but its effective capacity has been reduced by changes in structures and responsibilities and by corporate demands on staff to do other work. The improvement plan, which is complex and politically significant, will only be deliverable in a stable framework. The service has taken steps to increase its capacity by working with partners but not all opportunities have been explored. Performance management has been a weakness but the Council has taken steps to change the culture and staff are aware of their accountability for delivery. The service is good at performance managing programmes but has been weak in relating the delivery of programmes to wider outcomes. Outcome targets to bridge that gap are being introduced but it is too early to assess their success.
- 98 The Council's political leadership is aware of and addressing weaknesses in the Council. It is focused on its priorities and on managing performance to deliver on those priorities. Staff are much clearer as to their responsibilities, roles and accountability for performance. The Council is more engaged with stakeholders. The leader and portfolio holders regularly meet with key partners, including the chairs of the LSP and its economic sub-group and attend regional and sub-regional partnership meetings. Economic regeneration managers have good relations with stakeholders, whom they meet regularly, and keep the lead politicians briefed. Partners welcome this engagement and willingness to listen and take forward issues and are becoming more confident that the Council will deliver improvements.
- 99 However, the Council's commitment to delivering the improvement plan is still unclear because it is reviewing the corporate plan. Supporting local businesses, regeneration, improving awareness of Trafford and skills development are classed as medium-term priorities in the draft corporate plan but the economic development plan and other plans that will give substance to these priorities do not yet exist. Nor is there any financial commitment, other than the existing budget, though the service budget was protected for 2005/06. The Council recognises that the disparity between the prosperous and the deprived areas of the Borough is a threat to social cohesion. The Borough, though attractive as a place to live and carry out business, is in competition with other areas and continued efforts will be required to maintain the economic buoyancy. However the Council has not explicitly committed itself to achieving economic inclusion by linking opportunities to need.
- 100 The capacity of the service is limited by the small numbers of staff and budget. The Council has not assessed whether it has the human and financial resources to deliver economic regeneration. The task of strategic development of the service falls on a small number of people and this is a risk for the Council. Though the role of the service is primarily an enabling one, there are a wide range of partnerships and stakeholders that the service has to liaise with if it is to proactively promote Trafford's interests in the wider region and to coordinate and add value to regeneration initiatives within the Borough.

- 101 The service has a generally good track record of delivering its work programmes. It has successfully delivered major projects such as Sale Waterside, which has brought jobs, increased public usage of local facilities and visually enhanced what was previously a rundown corner of Sale. It is already addressing some of the issues identified by the economic appraisal such as improving the links between skills development and economic regeneration and helping local firms do business with the Council. The SRB and European programmes have been delivered successfully. However, the service has been subject to frequent additions of new responsibilities, changing structure and reporting arrangements and is about to be reorganised again. Some intended actions in service plans have slipped because of workload pressures or failure to accurately assess the workload implications of initiatives, the delay in production of the neighbourhood renewal strategy being a significant example.
- 102 The improvement plan contains a substantial workload with complex, politically significant tasks involving external partners. The service has assessed the risks of this and concluded that it is deliverable. However any further structural changes to the service or additional work load will make delivery of the action plan very difficult. So too will a lack of clear priorities or the determination to stick with them.
- 103 The Council has not taken a corporate approach to utilising all the potential resources available in an economically dynamic borough, for example how it might use its planning powers or manage its own assets to take advantage of the high land and property values in Trafford for the benefit of disadvantaged areas. Trafford receives very little external funding for regeneration because overall it is an affluent borough. This has meant that regeneration initiatives in the deprived parts of the Borough have been relatively small scale. The Council's services work largely in isolation but the issues faced by disadvantaged communities require coordinated action by a range of services, in and out of the Council, over a period of time. At present, the Council lacks the corporate mechanisms for such delivery.
- 104 The Council is giving increased attention to its membership of Greater Manchester forums to enhance its own resources. It works in cooperation with neighbouring councils to make better use of resources, either across the whole of Greater Manchester through Manchester Enterprises or bilaterally as with the Quays marketing initiative with Salford. However, the Council has not explored whether Trafford can contribute to the Greater Manchester offer in ways that could help other councils and organisations address their own issues for mutual benefit. Local area agreements may be a useful catalyst to such approaches.
- 105 The Council has been weak at performance management and information has not been reported to councillors. It recognises this and has put in place corporate systems to monitor service plans and performance indicators monthly. Staff welcome the clarity of the new arrangements and are aware of their responsibilities for performance management but it is too early to judge their robustness. The service has sound systems for regularly monitoring externally funded projects and programmes, which have been well-managed, but lacks systems for evaluating the wider impact of these programmes. It does not relate output measures for individual activities to broader outcomes. It does not comprehensively evaluate the impact of regeneration work by the Council and partners in terms of either the economy of the Borough or the relative position of parts of the Borough. It has identified a wider set of indicators to measure the impact of regeneration projects in the future but has not set targets or started to collect baseline information. Consequently the service cannot judge its impact on the wider economy of the Borough.

Summary

- 106 The best value review was a sound, challenging examination of the Council's economic development activity, which identified some major issues that need addressing. External partners agree with this diagnosis of the service. The service has drawn up an improvement plan to comprehensively address these issues, which has been risk-assessed to ensure it is deliverable, and should if implemented lead to significant improvement. Some actions have already been completed, with positive results. However key actions in the plan are to produce further documents, notably an economic development plan, but without a clear brief as to what should be in the documents or how they will be monitored and reviewed to ensure they remain relevant. Some actions were dropped from the improvement plan as a result of the risk assessment, which could slow progress and lose some opportunities.
- 107 The Council is aware of the problems it faces, is focused on delivery and is encouraging a performance management culture. Political and management leadership is strengthening relationships with partners. However, whilst there is political commitment to produce the economic development plan, the Council's regeneration priorities remain unclear.
- 108 The capacity of the service is limited by the small numbers of staff and by the budget. It has a generally good track record of delivering on its work programmes. However, it has been subject to frequent additions of new responsibilities, changes of structure and reporting arrangements and is about to go through another reorganisation. The improvement plan contains a substantial workload. The service has concluded, on the basis of its risk assessment, that it is deliverable. However, the tasks in the improvement plan are complex, politically significant and involve external partners. Further structural changes or additional work load will make delivery of the action plan very difficult.
- 109 Trafford receives very little external funding for regeneration because overall it is an affluent borough. However the Council has not adopted a corporate strategy on how to use all the potential resources available and take advantage of the economic buoyancy of Trafford for the benefit of disadvantaged areas.
- 110 The Council has been weak at performance management and information has not been reported to councillors. It recognises this and is putting in place stronger corporate systems. Staff welcome them but it is too early to judge their robustness. The service has sound systems for monitoring externally funded programmes, which have been well-managed but has not had systems for evaluating the wider impact of these programmes or of the other work of the service. Consequently, the service cannot judge its impact on the wider economy of the Borough.

Appendices

The purpose of a best value inspection is to make two judgements. The first is how good is the service being inspected? The second is what are the prospects for improvement? We carried out a range of activities to enable us to reach our judgements.

Documents reviewed

Before going on-site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that the Council provided for us. These included:

- ◆ Community Strategy;
- ◆ Corporate Priority Areas for Improvement 2004/05;
- ◆ Draft Corporate Plan 2005 to 2008;
- ◆ Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2005;
- ◆ Economic Development, Policy and Partnerships Service Improvement Plan 2004/05;
- ◆ Draft Economic Development, Policy and Partnerships Service Improvement Plan 2005/06;
- ◆ North West Regional Economic Strategy 2003 to 2006;
- ◆ Greater Manchester Economic Development Plan;
- ◆ Greater Manchester Economic Assessment;
- ◆ Draft Trafford Economic Assessment;
- ◆ Employment, Skills and Jobs Framework;
- ◆ Best Value Review;
- ◆ Best Value Review Improvement Plan Progress Report;
- ◆ Planning Guidelines for New Housing Development;
- ◆ Salford/ Trafford Western Gateway Framework (draft) 2002;
- ◆ Old Trafford Gateway Framework (draft) 2004;
- ◆ Strategic Development Framework for Partington (draft) 2003;
- ◆ Partington and Carrington SRB Delivery Plan 2005/06;
- ◆ Partington and Carrington Regeneration Partnership Evaluation 2004;
- ◆ Old Trafford and Gorse Hill SRB Delivery Plan 2005/06;
- ◆ Evaluation of Old Trafford SRB 1 programme 2003;
- ◆ Town Centre Delivery Plans; and
- ◆ Tourism Strategy.

Reality checks undertaken

When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. We also followed up on issues relating to the management of the review and the improvements flowing from it. Our reality checks included:

- ◆ tour of district, including town centres, Trafford Park;
- ◆ visits to Sale Waterside, Imperial War Museum, Old Trafford Cricket Ground, Partington Healthy Living Centre, Old Trafford Young Peoples Centre; and
- ◆ observation of meeting of Quays Marketing Group, Economic Alliance, Greater Manchester Economic Strategy Group, Learning Partnership.

List of people interviewed

We met a range of people involved with the service.

Angie Robinson	Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Avril Saunders	Head of Sports Development
Chris Woodcock	Kelloggs
Clive Dickens	Learning and Skills Council
Cllr Bernice Garlick	Opposition spokesperson on Economic development and asset management
Cllr Stephanie Poole	Executive member for Economic development and asset management
Cllr Susan Fildes	Leader of the Council
Darren Wisher	Regeneris Consulting Ltd
Dave Galvin	Head of Environmental Partnerships
Dennis Smith	Planning and Development Manager
Drew Thomas	Manchester Enterprises
Gary Pickering	Acting Chief Executive
Geoff Ball	Head of Construction and Environment
Graham Luccock	Head of Community Rights, Learning and Libraries
Jeremy Valentine	Head of Strategic Projects
John Bowen	Cofathec
John Hawkins	Association of Greater Manchester Authorities

John Steward	Manchester Enterprises
Ken Turner	MIDAS
Louise Connor	Job Centre Plus
Louise Cumberland	Head of Housing
Matthew Wall	Cofathec
Maurice Gubbins	North West Development Agency
Mike Ashton	Chamber Link
Mike Greenwood	Government Office North West
Paul Harvey	Interim Director of Environment and Development
Sue Jarvis	Manchester Enterprises
Suzanne Hilton	Head of Regeneration
Tzaraine Cope	Fairfield Residential Respite Care
Focus group	Community and voluntary groups
Focus group	Business representatives
Focus group	Economic development staff
Focus group	Other services staff