

ST&CC Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

March 2007



Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

Bournemouth Borough Council

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Our overall summary

- 1 This report provides an overall summary of the Audit Commission's assessment of the Council. It draws on the findings and conclusions from inspection work that has been undertaken in the last year, from a wider analysis of the Council's performance and its improvement over the last year as measured through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) framework, and from the external audit of the Council.
- 2 The report is addressed to the Council. In particular, it has been written for councillors, but is available as a public document for stakeholders, including members of the community served by the Council.
- 3 The main messages for the Council included in this report are:
 - The Council has maintained its overall CPA assessment of 'three stars'.
 - A number of key service areas have been assessed by the Audit Commission or by other inspectorates as 'three stars', including services for children and young people, services for adults and environment; although housing has declined from 4 to 2.
 - Overall, the Council has 'improved adequately' over the past calendar year, with variable progress against the improvement priorities in its corporate plan.
 - Residents' overall satisfaction with the Council has improved over the last three years.
 - The Council has taken some successful initiatives in support of 'Customer First', its highest ranking service improvement priority, but delivery of some of the major projects relating to this has been relatively slow and fragmented.
 - The Council's local area agreement (LAA) has been developed in close partnership with the community, and is now in the final stages of discussion with the local Government office.
 - Corporate capacity is being strengthened and refocused, with the recent appointment of a largely new team of executive directors and an increasing emphasis on community leadership
 - The Council has strengthened project management disciplines, an improvement that has contributed to the successful and timely delivery of most major corporate and regeneration projects.
 - The Council is strengthening its systems and processes for performance management, although there is scope for improving some important aspects of these, including arrangements for reporting progress against strategic aims and service improvement priorities.
 - The Council has made slow progress in developing and implementing improvement plans. In particular, several of the action plans for the corporate improvement programme have not been fully developed, and limited progress has been made on improvement planning for use of resources.

4 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter | Our overall summary

- Following inspection by the Audit Commission in December 2006, the Council's Supporting People programme was assessed as 'fair' with 'promising prospects for improvement'. Strengths included positive and improved outcomes for service users and an appropriate governance framework, but there were weaknesses in needs analysis and in joint commissioning and procurement.
- Your external auditors gave an unqualified opinion on your statement of accounts for 2005/06 and an unqualified VFM conclusion for the same year.
- For the purposes of the CPA your external auditor assessed the Council's overall arrangements for use of resources as a '3', with greatest opportunity for improvement in the area of value for money.

Action needed by the Council

4 The Council should:

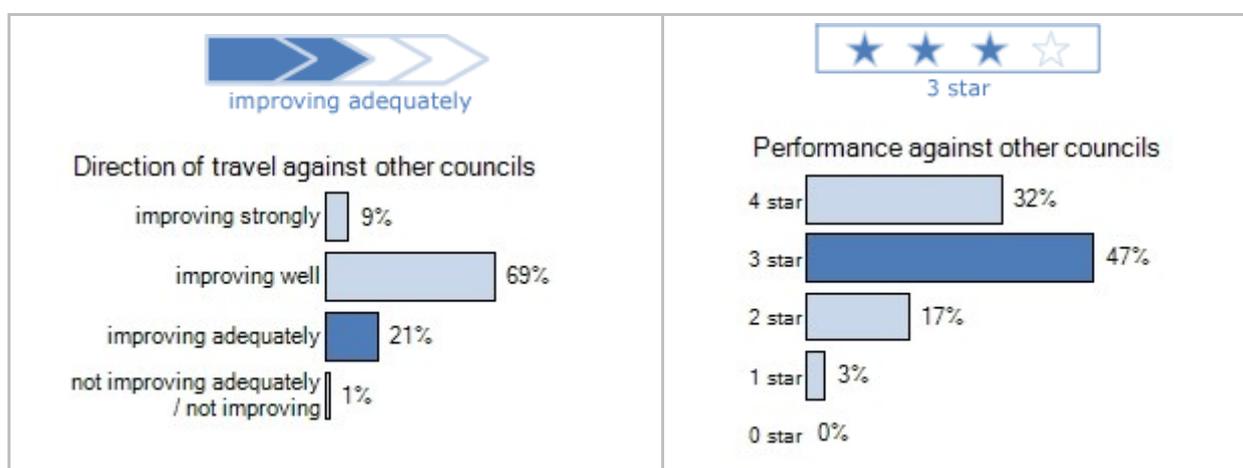
- take action to improve services for which performance indicators are in the worst quartile for unitary authorities nationally;
- complete all the action plans for the corporate improvement programme and monitor the implementation of these;
- develop an improvement programme for use of resources, in line with the priority that the Council has set for this; and
- strengthen arrangements for project management of the Customer First project.

How is Bournemouth Borough Council performing?

- 5 The Audit Commission's overall judgement is that Bournemouth Borough Council is improving adequately and we have classified the Council as 'three star' in its current level of performance under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. These assessments have been completed in all single tier and county councils with the following results:

Table 1

Bournemouth is a three star council and is improving adequately.



Source: Audit Commission

- 6 The detailed assessment for Bournemouth Borough Council is as follows:

Our overall assessment - the CPA scorecard

Table 2 CPA scorecard

Bournemouth is a 'three star' council and is improving adequately

| Element | Assessment |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Direction of Travel judgement | Improving adequately |
| Overall | 3 stars |
| Children and young people | 3 out of 4 |
| Social care (adults) | 3 out of 4 |
| Use of resources | 3 out of 4 |
| Housing | 2 out of 4 |
| Environment | 3 out of 4 |

6 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter | How is Bournemouth Borough Council performing?

| Element | Assessment |
|------------------------------------------|------------|
| Culture | 3 out of 4 |
| Benefits | 3 out of 4 |
| Corporate assessment/capacity to improve | 2 out of 4 |

(Note: 1=lowest, 4= highest)

The improvement since last year - our Direction of Travel report

Direction of Travel Statement

- 7 The following is Bournemouth Borough Council's agreed Direction of Travel statement, as it appears on the Audit Commission's website to accompany the above scorecard:

"Bournemouth Borough Council is improving adequately and is a 3 star council.

It made variable progress in improving priority services. Services for children and young people remained good, with improvements in educational achievement and personal well-being. However, Ofsted designated four schools with formal categories of concern. Adult social care remained good, and improvements included better care management processes and specialist domiciliary care. However, the number of people helped to live at home fell for all user groups, particularly older people. There were significant improvements in waste recycling and planning, and the Council and neighbouring authorities made good progress in delivering the Local Transport Plan. Housing services improved, but there was some decline in services for homeless people, and growth in affordable housing remained low. The Council opened and improved customer contact centres, but progress in taking forward the Customer First programme was slow.

Working with Bournemouth Partnership, and in close consultation with neighbourhood communities, the Council is developing a Local Area Agreement and Sustainable Community Strategy. It also introduced new strategies for improving corporate and service performance and use of resources, but has not yet developed detailed implementation plans for these."

Strategic aims and priorities

- 8 In support of the summary Direction of Travel statement reproduced above, we have assessed the Council's progress against its service improvement priorities.

Customer first

- 9 The Council has taken some successful initiatives in support of its 'Customer First' improvement priority. Its leisure, parks, seafront and cultural services are easy to access, provide good customer service and are responsive to customer needs. Children's services are accessible, responsive and focused, and a new drop-in office in Wallisdown has improved access to adult services. The St Stephen's reception area at the Town Hall has been refurbished and now provides a range of new customer facilities in a welcoming atmosphere. A wide range of consultation exercises has been used to inform service development. Recent work on 'community leadership' and 'investing in our communities' also has a clear customer focus.
- 10 Delivery of and progress on some major projects relating to 'Customer First' have been relatively slow and fragmented. The Council does not have a comprehensive access strategy based on the identified needs of all sections of the community. It has implemented a corporate customer relationship management system but is not yet making full use of this. There have been delays in opening the customer service centre planned for Boscombe, and in transferring services to the customer contact centre. However recent changes in corporate culture and senior management, and initiatives to strengthen project management and performance management, are now providing 'Customer First' with stronger direction and clearer focus.

Recycling

- 11 Recycling of household waste rose from 16.9 per cent in 2004/05 to 20 per cent in 2005/06, which was in the best quartile for unitary councils nationally. However, the Council did not meet the recycling target (including composting) of 30 per cent set for it by DEFRA, and was in the worst quartile of councils nationally for performance relative to local target. The Council introduced new arrangements for kerbside recycling in autumn 2006, which have in recent months resulted in a notable increase in the recycling of household waste (subject to audit).

Safer communities

- 12 Statistics for Bournemouth's Crime, Drugs and Disorder Partnership show several improving trends in 2005/06. There were fewer burglaries, robberies, thefts of motor vehicles, and sexual offences, compared with 2004/05, and youth re-offending also fell. The number of violent crimes rose, although most of these involved less serious offences such as common assaults and criminal damage. Bournemouth compared favourably with 'family group' councils for most types of recorded crime in 2005/06, but was in the worst quartile for sexual offences and violent crime. The Council and partners are well placed to meet LPSA 'stretch targets' for reducing drug-related burglaries and reducing the impact of domestic violence. Bournemouth is one of forty areas chosen by the Government to be in the first wave of the 'Respect' programme, in recognition of its strong track record in tackling anti social behaviour.

Affordable housing

- 13** Growth in the supply of affordable housing in the borough remains slow. Registered social landlords completed or started 67 affordable homes in 2005/06, and 23 homes were completed through Section 106 agreements. The Council has begun to take a more strategic approach to increasing the supply of affordable housing, which includes strengthening the housing strategy and enabling team, adopting project management disciplines and a programme board, developing a new housing strategy and reviewing Section 106 policy, and redeploying some of its own housing assets and land.
- 14** Most of the Council's services as a housing landlord were above average, and just under half were in the best quartile for councils nationally in 2005/06. Voluntary improvement work by the Audit Commission in 2006 also highlighted several improvements in the housing service since the inspection in 2004, including greater customer focus, better understanding of diversity, faster re-letting of properties and more rigorous performance management. However, the work also identified potential improvements to sheltered housing services and the Council is currently reviewing this service area.
- 15** The Council has brought most of its housing stock up to the Decent Homes Standard, well ahead of the target date of 2010, and is implementing a higher 'Bournemouth Standard'. Only 1.8 per cent of the housing stock was 'non-decent' at 31 March 2006, making Bournemouth one of the best-performing councils nationally on this measure. The Council had taken action to bring 84 private sector homes occupied by vulnerable groups up to the 'decent homes' standard by June 2006, which exceeded the LPSA 'stretch target' for this.
- 16** The Council was selected as Regional Homelessness Champion in 2005, reflecting its success in helping homeless people in recent years. However, there was some decline in outcomes for homeless people in 2005/06. The average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation rose from 2 weeks in 2004/05 to 4 weeks in 2005/06, and remains in the worst quartile for unitary councils. However although the average stay in hostel accommodation rose from 4 weeks to 5 weeks in 2005/06, this was lower than the average of 6.5 weeks for unitary councils.

Sustainable transport

- 17** The Department of Transport assessed delivery of objectives in the First Local Transport Plan as 'good' in 2006, compared with 'fair' in 2005. The Council was commended for the increase in bus patronage, which rose from 9.5 million passenger journeys in 2004/05 to 11.0 million in 2005/06. This in large part reflects the successful introduction of cross-conurbation bus routes. However, there were concerns about the lack of progress on the delivery of the park and ride strategy.

- 18 The Council is not meeting its targets for reducing road casualties in Bournemouth. The number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions in the borough fell only slightly, from 86 in 2004/05 to 85 in 2005/06, compared with a target for the year of 64. The number of people slightly injured fell from 772 to 758, compared with a target of 716. The Council remains in the worst quartile for the rolling three year average percentage reduction in road accident deaths and injuries.

Cultural renewal

- 19 The Council is making good progress against the objectives it has set for cultural renewal. The Bournemouth International Centre has received a number of accolades and recognitions, following its successful major redevelopment, which was completed on time and within budget. Other major renewal projects in process of development or implementation include work on Bournemouth Pier, the construction of a training hotel, the refurbishment of the Pavilion, and the redevelopment of the Winter Gardens as an arts and music education centre.

Children's services

- 20 Overall, educational performance remains strong. Most of Bournemouth's results for national tests and GCSEs in 2005/06 showed an improving trend and were in the best quartile, or above average, for unitary councils nationally. However, the Council is not currently on track for meeting the LPSA target for improving the performance of 11 year olds at the end of Key Stage 2. Results for A and A/S levels in 2005/06 also generally compared well with other councils. However, Ofsted has designated four schools in the borough with formal categories of concern since September 2005, in light of which the Council is strengthening its arrangements for assisting schools at risk of failure. A new 'hard to place' protocol with all secondary schools has halted the upward trend in exclusions.
- 21 The Council and partners have together made progress against priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan for improving the lives of children and young people. Recent initiatives include an innovative pilot scheme, in partnership with Bournemouth and Poole PCT, to support young people who have been diagnosed as clinically obese. All schools now have an anti bullying policy. The Council has also taken action in response to areas for improvement identified by the joint area review (JAR) in autumn 2005, such as the negotiation of discounted bus fares for young people.

Cleaner streets

- 22 The Council has introduced neighbourhood cleansing services and made good use of new enforcement powers for dealing with litter. BV performance indicators were better than average for unitary councils, or in the best quartile, in 2005/06 for unacceptable levels of litter and detritus, graffiti and fly-posting. This is a commendable achievement given the pressure on cleansing services arising from Bournemouth's popularity as a tourist centre and its flourishing night-time economy.

Boscombe regeneration

- 23 The Council is making further progress with projects for regenerating areas of Boscombe, and has been successful in securing external and Section 106 funding for these. Current initiatives include the refurbishment of Boscombe pier and the construction of an artificial surf reef, the restoration of Boscombe Chine Gardens, and private sector housing improvement.

Planning

- 24 Speed in determining planning applications improved in 2005/06. The proportion of 'major' applications determined in 13 weeks rose from 60 per cent in 2004/05 to 69 per cent in 2005/06, above the national target of 60 per cent, and compared well with the average of 64 per cent for unitary councils. The proportion of 'minor' applications determined in 8 weeks rose considerably from 36 per cent to 60 per cent, but still did not meet the Government's target of 65 per cent and remained in the worst quartile. The proportion of 'other' applications determined in 8 weeks rose from 66 per cent to 83 per cent, which met the national target of 80 per cent, and was just below the average of 85 per cent for unitary councils. These improving trends have continued, with attainment for each category now well in excess of the national target.
- 25 The Council has broadly maintained the quality of its planning decisions, as measured by appeals allowed by the Planning Inspectorate against decisions to refuse permission. The proportion of appeals allowed rose from 26 per cent in 2004/05 to 28 per cent in 2005/06, comparable with the average of 31 per cent for unitary councils.

Equality and diversity

- 26 The Council remains at Level 1 of the Equalities Standard for Local Government. It has not undertaken equality impact assessments and so cannot demonstrate that equality and diversity are embedded in the delivery of all its services. It is, however, gradually developing a more cohesive corporate approach to these issues. Recent initiatives include the adoption of an equality policy, the implementation of race and disability equality schemes, the appointment of social inclusion and diversity champions, and the introduction of equality and diversity training. Extensive consultation exercises and the newly-adopted 'community leadership' role are also helping the Council to identify and address diversity and equality issues.
- 27 Attainment for some best value equality performance indicators remains comparatively weak - for example, in respect of the representation in the Council's workforce of staff of people with disabilities and people from black and minority ethnic communities. There was a notable increase in the proportion of council buildings accessible to disabled people, which rose from 24.2 per cent in 2004/05 to 50.5 per cent in 2005/06 but remains in line with the average for unitary councils.

Residents' satisfaction survey

- 28** Residents' overall satisfaction with the Council has improved over the last three years. The BVPI User Survey for 2006/07 showed that 54 per cent of residents were satisfied with the Council overall, which compared with 49 per cent in 2003/04 and was in the best quartile for unitary councils. However, satisfaction with complaints handling fell from 39 per cent to 32 per cent, and the proportion of residents who think that the Council keeps them well informed about the services and benefits it provides fell from 53 per cent to 47 per cent.
- 29** Residents' satisfaction with most services has risen over the period 2003/04 to 2006/07. Levels of satisfaction with recycling (67 per cent), cleanliness (77 per cent), housing landlord services (90 per cent), buses (62 per cent), sports and leisure facilities (65 per cent), libraries (79 per cent), parks and open spaces (83 per cent), theatres and concert halls (60 per cent) have increased since 2003/04 and compare well with other unitary councils. Satisfaction with waste collection fell to 81 per cent in 2006/07, but remains in the best quartile. Satisfaction with the planning service fell to 61 per cent, which was in the worst quartile.
- 30** There has been a positive trend in public perceptions of environmental and community safety issues in Bournemouth over the last three years. Significantly fewer residents consider that the borough faces problems in respect of vandalism, graffiti and damage, teenagers hanging around, rubbish and litter, rowdy behaviour and drunkenness, and abandoned cars – results which were in the best quartile or above average for councils nationally. However, 52 per cent of residents identified traffic congestion as something most in need of improvement, which put the Council firmly in the worst quartile for this.

Sustaining improvement

Local Area Agreement

- 31** Working with Bournemouth Partnership, and in close consultation with neighbourhood communities, the Council has developed a Local Area Agreement (LAA). This will become operative in spring 2007, subject to agreement with the Government Office of the South West. The Bournemouth LAA 2007-2010 provides a sound strategic framework for improving quality of life in the borough and for reducing relative deprivation.
- 32** A notable feature of the LAA is the development and delivery of initiatives at neighbourhood level. This approach builds on the Council's success in developing neighbourhood working in Boscombe West and other areas of the borough, and is central to the 'community leadership' style of working adopted by it.
- 33** In a closely related initiative, the Council has worked with partners to develop a sustainable community strategy. This is scheduled for publication in spring 2007, and will incorporate the targets and initiatives in the LAA.

Corporate improvement plan

- 34 The Council has made slow progress in developing improvement planning. It has implemented a corporate improvement programme to address weaknesses in capacity identified by the Corporate Assessment in 2005, with emphasis on people development, performance and project management and communications. However, some of the implementation plans for this programme are not yet fully developed. The Council is also developing a programme for improving use of resources, but has made limited progress with this.

Capacity

- 35 Corporate capacity has been strengthened, in support of the delivery of Council improvement priorities. The Chief Executive is providing strong leadership and has built a new senior management team, including some new external appointments. The Council has made some major organisational changes, including the creation of an executive board, one aim of which is to improve joint service working and the delivery of cross-cutting initiatives. It has strengthened project management disciplines, contributing to the successful and timely delivery of most major corporate and regeneration projects. It is also strengthening its systems and processes for performance management, although there is scope for improving some important aspects of these, including arrangements for reporting progress against strategic aims and service improvement priorities. The Council has had continuing success in attracting external funding for improvement projects - for example, its joint bid with Poole Council under the Government's Building Schools for the Future programme has been allocated to 'Wave Six', with planning arrangements for this due to start in 2007.

Service inspections

- 36 An important aspect of the role of the Relationship Manager is to work with other inspectorates and regulators who also review and report on the council's performance. Relationship Managers share information and seek to provide 'joined up' regulation to the Council.
- 37 Following their annual performance assessment, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) awarded the Council three stars (out of four) for Adult Social Services in 2006, the same rating as in 2005. The service was found to be 'serving most people well', but prospects for improvement were 'uncertain', compared with 'promising' in 2005. Among the conclusions reached by the Commission were that the service had clear strategic direction, was modernising the delivery of services and had improved care management processes, with shorter times for assessments and the delivery of care packages. However, the number of people helped to live at home fell for all user groups, particularly older people.

- 38 CSCI and OfSTED awarded the Council three stars (out of four) for Children's Services in their annual performance assessment of the service area, as in 2005. The service was assessed as 'good' both for delivering and maintaining outcomes for children and young people and for its capacity to improve. Among the conclusions reached by the inspectorates were that partnership working was very effective, and that consultation with children and young people was a particular strength. However, the Council and partners were considered to need to collaborate more on post-16 learning to provide more choice for young people.
- 39 A national review of community mental health services by the Mental Health Commission and CSCI judged Bournemouth to have excellent services.
- 40 The Benefits Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI's) 2006 CPA assessment of the Council's benefit service was 'good', the same rating as in 2005. Among the conclusions reached by the BFI were that there had been improvements in claims processing, security and performance management.

Supporting People inspection

- 41 The Council's Supporting People programme was inspected by the Audit Commission in December 2006. The service was assessed as 'fair' with 'promising prospects for improvement'.
- 42 The inspection identified a number of strengths, including positive and improved outcomes for service users, the involvement of users in the programme and in service reviews, and an appropriate governance framework. However, needs analyses were incomplete, joint commissioning and procurement were under-developed, and progress on improving equalities and diversity was slow.
- 43 Prospects for improvement were considered promising principally because of a recent trend of improvement in a number of key measures, the capacity of the service to improve, and the impact of service and corporate leadership committed to this.

Access to Services inspection

- 44 We have recently carried out the fieldwork element of our service inspection of access to services but have not yet formally reported. The final outcomes of this inspection will be reported in May 2007 and will be summarised in the next audit and inspection letter.

Financial management and value for money

- 45 Your appointed auditor has reported separately to the Audit and Governance sub-panel on the issues arising from the 2005/06 audit and has provided:
- an unqualified opinion on your accounts;
 - a conclusion on your VFM arrangements to say that these arrangements are adequate; and
 - a report on the Best Value Performance Plan confirming that the Plan has been audited.
- 46 The findings of the auditor are an important component of the CPA framework described above. In particular the Use of Resources score is derived from the assessments made by the auditor in the following areas.
- Financial Reporting (including the preparation of the accounts of the Council and the way these are presented to the public).
 - Financial management (including how the financial management is integrated with strategy to support council priorities).
 - Financial Standing (including the strength of the Council's financial position).
 - Internal Control (including how effectively the Council maintains proper stewardship and control of its finances).
 - Value for money (including an assessment of how well the Council balances the costs and quality of its services).
- 47 For the purposes of the CPA your auditor has assessed the Council's arrangements for use of resources in these five areas as follows.

Table 3

The Council received an overall score of '3' for use of resources

| Element | Assessment |
|--------------------------------------------|------------|
| Financial reporting | 3 out of 4 |
| Financial management | 3 out of 4 |
| Financial standing | 3 out of 4 |
| Internal control | 3 out of 4 |
| Value for money | 2 out of 4 |
| Overall assessment of the Audit Commission | 3 out of 4 |

(Note: 1=lowest, 4=highest; 2 = 'adequate' performance)

48 The key issues arising from the audit, as reflected in the above judgements where appropriate, are as follows:

- The Council continues to produce good quality financial statements reasonably soon after the end of the financial year and these are supported by good quality working papers.
- Overall performance against budget was satisfactory in 2005/06 and similarly the Council continues to develop its medium term financial planning so that there are clear and strong links with strategic priorities.
- Financial standing remains satisfactory and therefore provides significant help in meeting the financial pressures that are being exerted upon the Council.
- Internal Control arrangements, including risk management arrangements, continue to be satisfactory.
- In terms of quality and cost of services, the Council's performance is mixed. Services that have struggled include planning where investment has led to improvements. To achieve a higher rating under Use of Resources, however, will require the Council to deliver high quality services at appropriate cost for a sustained period of time.
- Specific recommendations include continuing to develop the use that is made of information produced by the performance management system so that areas of poorer performance are addressed promptly.

Data Quality and Performance Indicators

49 For 2006/07 we were required to review the Council's management arrangements to secure good data quality, and to give a score between one and four for the arrangements, where a score of 1 indicates inadequate performance and 4 a strong performance. The assessment covered five themes of data quality. These themes, and the Council's score for each, are set out below.

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Governance and leadership | 2 |
| Policies and procedures | 2 |
| Systems and processes | 3 |
| People and Skills | 1 |
| Data use | 4 |
| Overall score | 2 |

50 As reflected in the table above, the Council achieved an overall assessment of level two in terms of data quality. In overall terms we concluded that the Council's arrangements to secure good data quality are adequate but with one specific area where arrangements needed to be strengthened.

- 51 The '1' score for People and Skills occurred because of the following factors:
- There has been no corporate assessment of data quality skills.
 - Data quality roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined.
 - There is no provision of data quality training.
- 52 An important action to improve this area is for the Council to approve and implement its draft Data Quality Strategy.
- 53 In addition we audited a sample of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) and other non-Best Value indicators for 2005/06 in the areas of culture, environment and housing. The outcome of our audit may be that the indicator is passed (ie accepted as fairly stated), amended (ie the value of the indicator needs to be changed) or reserved (ie we are unable to conclude that the indicator has been fairly stated as there are weaknesses in the systems used to produce the figures). The results of our testing are summarised below:

| Area | Number passed | Number amended | Number reserved | Total number audited |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Culture | 2 | - | - | 2 |
| Environment | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Housing | 4 | - | 1 | 5 |

Accounts

- 54 As indicated in the Use of Resources section the Council was able to prepare good quality 2005/06 Accounts. We did, however, identify a small number of errors that needed to be corrected and also some balance sheet items that were misclassified between creditors and bank overdraft. These were also adjusted but had no impact upon the consolidated revenue account.
- 55 In addition to our work in connection with Use of Resources and the Council's Accounts we have also performed other pieces of work including work in connection with the sale of Bournemouth Transport Ltd which was completed in 2005/06. The sale was subject to a number of issues including a request from the Department of Transport that the Council reopen the tender process. The Council complied with this request and the sale was successfully concluded shortly before the end of the financial year.

Conclusion

- 56 This letter has been discussed and agreed with the Chief Executive and forwarded to all councillors by 31 March 2007. A copy of the letter will be presented to councillors in April 2007.
- 57 The Council has taken a positive and constructive approach to our audit and inspection I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the council's assistance and co-operation.

Availability of this letter

- 58 This letter will be published on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk, and also on the Council's website.

Martin Robinson
Relationship Manager