

Neighbourhood Renewal

Newcastle City Council

May 2009



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Service Inspections

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

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

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

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

Summary

- 1 This inspection asks 'how good is the neighbourhood regeneration service/and will it improve? We have focused on three neighbourhoods, selected by the Council, as case studies of Newcastle's approach to neighbourhood regeneration.
- 2 The Council, with its partners, has identified five areas as priorities for regeneration, being the most deprived communities in Newcastle. The Council has suggested three of them as the areas which the inspection should focus on: Walker, Scotswood Benwell and Elswick. Further details of findings in these neighbourhoods are attached as Appendix 1.
- 3 Our judgement is that Newcastle City Council is delivering a 'fair' neighbourhood regeneration service that has uncertain prospects for improvement. The Council has been involved for many years in regeneration schemes across the City with varying degrees of success. The City has a deep-seated legacy of worklessness, deprivation and depopulation in some areas. In Elswick, progress has been made against all indicators of regeneration – the only New Deal area where this is so. This progress is recognised by the community. In Walker the Planning Framework has been put in place for regeneration, the community has been effectively involved, but only limited numbers of new houses have been built. In Scotswood, a great deal of demolition and land assembly has been achieved and local people have been re-housed effectively but no new houses have been built, although a new school, Excelsior Academy, opened in September 2008.
- 4 The Council has had a reputation for slow and cumbersome processes, particularly amongst businesses and the voluntary and community sectors. Decisions have been slow. In the past, there has been limited strategic direction and some staff, residents and partners are still not clear about future plans. However, there is now much better strategic alignment across the Council and there is a sense of greater engagement and pace since the restructuring of the Council in 2008. Stronger delivery channels and governance arrangements are being put in place, based on proven successful models elsewhere in the Council such as Building Schools for the Future.
- 5 The Council has had mixed success in improving outcomes for users and the community. Overall, Newcastle is relatively less deprived compared to other areas in 2007 than it was in 2004. Crime has reduced, educational attainment has improved but the gap has not narrowed on health and economic indicators. The Council is working with partners to deliver pathways to work with some success, for example Newcastle Futures have placed over 1,200 people into work in under two years. Resident satisfaction is generally high and increasing in Elswick and Walker but below average in Scotswood Benwell. In all three neighbourhoods resident satisfaction is higher than the city average for changes made to the area, ability to influence decisions, and opportunity to participate, but lower than average with the local area as a place to live, satisfaction with choice of housing, and feeling safe after dark.

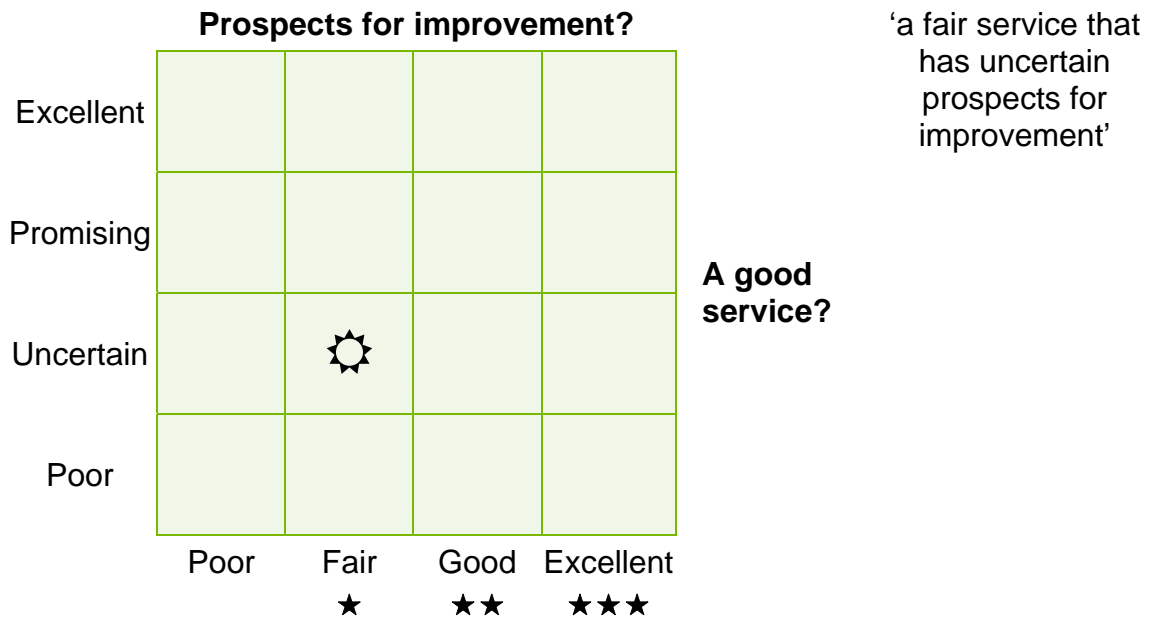
Summary

- 6 Community capacity has increased, particularly in Elswick, as a result of regeneration. The Council has good arrangements for consulting and engaging with residents on its regeneration plans, and there have been imaginative consultation events held in Walker. Services have increased their presence in communities through the use of neighbourhood response managers and neighbourhood wardens. There is an improving relationship with the business community across the city. However, there are also weaknesses in communication and engagement: communication with local businesses is not always effective and engagement with the voluntary sector is inconsistent. Communication is not always sufficiently timely, and the council is not good at communicating changes to plans, or completing the consultation process by explaining outcomes resulting from consulting to those who took part.
- 7 The Council is mindful for the need to begin to make rapid process in regenerating its five priority areas, and transplanting the lessons from these areas to the wider communities of Newcastle. It has, over the last 18 months, begun to deliver a series of notable changes including the following.
- Supporting the creation of the City Development Company, with Gateshead.
 - Defining, with partners, a clear vision for the City within the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS); with shorter-term targets being expressed within the Local Area Agreement (LAA).
 - An increased focus on the five strategic commission areas (including the three areas looked at in this inspection), being the most deprived communities in Newcastle, where outcomes must be delivered.
 - Revised its regeneration strategy, and made it link more clearly to the SCS and LAA.
 - Established clear plans for the development of neighbourhoods.
 - Established a Regeneration Delivery Board to oversee the delivery of regeneration in the City. However, it is new and had met only once prior to the inspection.
 - Implemented a new corporate, and LSP, performance management system, which will link to a suite of actions plans which are intended to drive the delivery of change.
- 8 In making our assessment of neighbourhood regeneration, and in comparing Newcastle to other local areas where we have undertaken similar work, we have not been able to point to any major areas where proposals for change or development have been omitted. However, these proposals for change and development have only recently been instituted. Whilst strategies and plans are now generally clear, they are not yet sufficiently well integrated, or translated fully into action plans with a clear outcome focus at local level.

Scoring the service

9 We have assessed Newcastle City 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.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

¹ 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.

Summary

10 Neighbourhood renewal in Newcastle is a fair one star service because:

- there has been good resident involvement in regeneration in Elswick, and good engagement by residents in plan making in Walker and Scotswood Benwell;
- there have been improved outcomes in Elswick in resident satisfaction, in narrowing the gap with the city average for crime, educational attainment, health and employment; and the overall gap in vitality between Elswick and the city has narrowed by five percentage points;
- there is good targeted provision for disadvantaged groups in providing pathways to work;
- there are good transitional arrangements in place to support housing renewal in Walker (The Walker Promise) and improved service in Elswick and Scotswood Benwell through neighbourhood response managers and neighbourhood wardens working with residents to manage the environment; and
- some new facilities have opened, such as the Excelsior Academy at Scotswood, the Nunsmoor Community Centre and Customer Service/Health Centres, which are the signs of investment in the area and a demonstration of better services for the future.

11 However:

- significant gaps remain between the least deprived and most deprived neighbourhoods in the City. In the three neighbourhoods reviewed, Elswick has closed the gap with the city average (using the Council's measures of deprivation); Scotswood Benwell and Walker have improved but at broadly the same rate as overall city improvements, so the gap to those areas has remained the same;
- no new housing has been built in Scotswood, and no new shops and limited community facilities in Walker;
- engagement is inconsistent, communication is not always timely, and it is not clear if all sections of the community are adequately engaged, for example the BME business community;
- the needs of, and support provided to, businesses is not clear. Some local businesses feel they are not adequately supported through regeneration; and
- the Council does not have a systematic approach to assessing VFM in neighbourhood regeneration which it could use as a basis for future decision making.

- 12** The neighbourhood renewal service has uncertain prospects for improvement. On the positive side:
- the recent restructure to form the Environment and Regeneration Directorate, and the new Area Based Regeneration service, together with the Council's new Regeneration Delivery Board, provide stronger leadership, capacity and a clearer focus on delivery;
 - the new delivery partnerships under the Newcastle Partnership have clear responsibility for the delivery of future LAA targets; and
 - the Council has demonstrated its ability to respond to change through its proactive approach to the economic downturn and taking the initiative with its partners to sustain regeneration programmes
- 13** However:
- the Council has a mixed track record of delivery on regeneration schemes, and the pace of improvement is very slow;
 - Council processes can be slow and cumbersome, and there is insufficient co-ordination across services and Directorates, and between agencies at the local level; and
 - different strategies are not sufficiently integrated, there is a lack of outcome focused action plans, and the revised corporate performance management arrangements are too new to have yet been able to be cascaded to a local level.
- 14** The Council has a radical programme of transformation underway which it intends should address these issues. However, at the time of the inspection this process is in its early stages, and has not yet delivered the planned benefits.

Recommendations

15 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition, we identify the approximate costs² and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council should do the following.

Recommendation

- R1** Set clear targets and action plans to deliver the Council's strategy for the delivery physical, social and economic regeneration, to ensure strategic vision is speedily translated into local action:
- clarify the outcomes the Council is seeking to achieve through regeneration; and
 - make clear how councillors, partners and services across the Council contribute to the way forward by linking existing plans.

16 The expected benefits of this recommendation are clear roles and responsibilities for the Council, partners and the community to deliver improvement.

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

Recommendation

- R2** Give increased responsibility to local Council regeneration teams to deliver action plans, improve co-ordination of services provided by partners and the Council, and share the learning from successful initiatives such as Elswick NDC. There is scope to consider some form of local innovation clinics in the three areas, involving those locally who are responsible for delivering change, or will benefit from change; to identify things that are working well, things that are a barrier to change; and to maximise the amount of decision making which is delegated to local areas and the bodies/officers within them.

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

17 The expected benefits of this recommendation are as follows.

- Staff will be empowered to deliver.
- Local services will be better co-ordinated.
- Good practice will be shared and adopted across the City.

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

Recommendation

R3 Improve dialogue about local regeneration with stakeholders to improve understanding of their specific needs and issues. Use this to enable more focused responses which better meet the needs of all sections of the community, the voluntary sector and SMEs.

18 The expected benefits of this recommendation are as follows.

- Improved management of residents expectations.
- Improved targeting of activity.

19 The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2009

Recommendation

R4 Assess the costs and benefits of neighbourhood regeneration services and whether they are providing good value for money to the public purse. Include in this consideration of the costs of neighbourhood management, the costs and contributions of partners, the benefits in terms of quality of life to residents, and learning from different approaches adopted in different neighbourhoods in Newcastle and elsewhere.

20 The expected benefits of this recommendation are that the Council and partners will have a clearer evidence based view on the value for money provided by their neighbourhood regeneration approach.

21 The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by March 2010.

Recommendations

Recommendation

R5 Develop stronger collaboration between economic regeneration and the Council's procurement function to ensure that opportunities for local people and businesses to participate are maximised and taken up.

- 22** The expected benefits of this recommendation are that businesses and people in Newcastle will derive more benefit from public procurement and investment.
- 23** The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2009.

Recommendation

R6 The Council, including local ward members, should consider how best to respond to the issue of the role of local elected political representatives in shaping local regeneration and being positive advocates for change. Clearly the Council has a role in ensuring local councillors are properly involved and briefed on proposed changes; whilst local councillors also have a responsibility to be constructive leaders and advocates of change on behalf of their local areas. This might be done through an ongoing series of briefing meetings, ensuring appropriate involvement in the definition of local plans, and inviting all political groupings to take part in a dialogue about the role of councillors as both local advocates and constructive leaders of change.

- 24** The expected benefits of this recommendation are that there will be a clearer and more co-ordinated leadership of regeneration activity within local areas.
- 25** The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2009.

Report

Context

The locality

- 26** Newcastle is one of the five boroughs which make up the Tyne and Wear conurbation, and it is the regional capital for a population of over 2 million people. Its population stands at 270,500 with a further 90,000 travelling into the city each day to work. It is mainly built-up but also includes rural areas to the west and north west. Population declined between 1991 and 2001 but since 2001 this trend has been reversed. Black and minority ethnic communities made up 6.9 per cent of the population in 2001, with significant concentrations in some inner areas such as Benwell and Elswick.
- 27** Newcastle city centre is a major regional centre for employment, services, shopping and night life. However, immediately beyond the city centre and in inner areas of the city there is significant deprivation. Newcastle was the 37 most deprived borough in the country in 2007, a relative improvement from its position in 2004, with a quarter of its population living in neighbourhoods which are within the 10 per cent most deprived nationally. Educational attainment, levels of qualifications and life expectancy are below the national average.
- 28** The housing market in Newcastle has both areas of affluence and growth in house prices to the north of the city, and areas of low demand and abandonment in the inner city. The economy is being strengthened through initiatives such as the redevelopment of the Quayside, and the plans for Science City, but is being affected by the recession which has already impacted upon local companies such as Northern Rock.

The Council

- 29** The composition of the Council is 49 Liberal Democrat, and 29 Labour councillors. Executive portfolios are cross-cutting, with three portfolios addressing the effective management of the council, and six covering the delivery of services and the achievement of the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) objectives and Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets. The leader and deputy leader have been in place since May 2006.
- 30** The Council restructured in 2007 following a review by SOLACE, with the creation of the Environment and Regeneration Directorate, and subsequently appointed an Executive Director for Environment and Regeneration in April 2008, and a Director of Area-Based Regeneration in August 2008. The Council has also created a Regeneration Board which is attended by the leader, deputy leader, and the executive Member responsible for regeneration and housing as well as senior officers.

Report

31 The Council employs 15,000 people. The net revenue budget for 2008/09 is £262.6 million, and there is a capital programme of £245 million. The Council is currently undergoing a Transformation programme that will see £18.6 million of savings generated in 2009, and the redeployment or loss of some 500 (mainly managerial) posts.

Neighbourhood regeneration in the Council

32 Regeneration is a cross-cutting activity and as such our inspection has taken into account the impact of the full range of Council services on the regeneration objectives it has set out with partners. The Council's Regeneration service is mainly located within the Environment and Regeneration Directorate. However, the focus of the inspection has been on neighbourhood regeneration and the inspection has therefore involved many other services of the Council as well as a full range of partners and agencies in Newcastle.

The scope of the inspection

33 The agreed scope of this inspection is covered by the Audit Commission's cross-cutting generic regeneration and neighbourhood renewal key lines of enquiry (KLOEs). This includes the following.

- Achieving progress against national and regional priorities, for example a stronger economy and improved quality of life.
- Success in tackling local deprivation and reducing inequalities.
- Whether the Council is fulfilling its role in regeneration.
- Whether the service is giving good value for money.

How good is the service?

34 This first judgement aims to assess, and balance:

- what the service is aiming to achieve;
- is the service meeting the needs of local communities and users;
- how well the service responds to users and residents;
- how the service responds to people from diverse backgrounds; and
- what service outcomes are.

What has the service aimed to achieve?

Regional and national priorities

- 35** The Government's overall vision is that within 10 to 20 years nobody should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. It has an aspiration that 80 per cent of the working age population should be in work. National policy is to make sustainable improvements in the economic performance of all the English regions by 2008 and over the long term reduce the persistent gap in growth rates between the regions.
- 36** The North East councils are working to achieve this vision through the Regional Spatial Strategy, approved in 2008, and the Regional Economic Strategy, approved in 2006. The Regional Economic Strategy aims to focus sustainable development in the two city regions of Tees Valley and Tyne and Wear. The Tyne and Wear city region has agreed a development programme and business case with the key aims of strengthening the economy, creating more jobs, helping people get back to work, improving transport links, and increasing the choice of housing. This provides some assurance that the Council is playing a full part in the strategic leadership of future regeneration challenges within the North East, as well as Tyne and Wear, and Newcastle.
- 37** The City Development Company, a joint venture between Newcastle and Gateshead, has been set up in response to the city region agenda to drive economic development. Key projects in Newcastle include Science City; and Bridging NewcastleGateshead, the housing market renewal pathfinder, which plays a key role in the regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods, and now has helped Newcastle and Gateshead to achieve growth-point status.

How good is the service?

The Council's corporate ambitions, strategies and priorities for improvement

- 38** The Council's Regeneration strategy, approved in 2006, has been updated and expanded in combination with the second Local Area Agreement (LAA(2)) to form the first Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) for Newcastle. This strategy is based around five long term 'big challenges' reflecting the local context, as follows.
- Driving economic competitiveness and enabling all of our communities to participate in the economy.
 - Long term demographic change and health.
 - Creating opportunities from climate change.
 - Housing and communities.
 - Addressing causes and symptoms of child poverty.
- 39** The SCS long term vision, aims and objectives are set out under the following six partnership themes.
- Strengthening the economy.
 - Improving wellbeing, health and independence.
 - Managing environmental impact.
 - Creating and sustaining quality places to live.
 - Creating safe, inclusive, cohesive and empowered communities.
 - Improving outcomes for children and young people.
- 40** The Council now has a clear hierarchy of strategies and plans but these do not all link to the local level and the Council still lacks comprehensive action plans with SMART targets. Some plans and targets are only developed at the city-wide level. The new area based regeneration framework is seeking to define outcomes and targets for local areas building on the spatial Area Action Plans for Walker and Scotswood/Benwell. This will pull together the detailed targets from neighbourhood regeneration plans, disaggregated targets from citywide strategies, and local targets (for example from Bridging Newcastle Gateshead (BNG)) and other partners, enabling performance management of local area delivery for the first time but this is not yet in place.

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

Neighbourhood renewal

- 41** The Council's approach to neighbourhood renewal has seen the delivery of major programmes of investment across areas which differ depending upon the history of regeneration, the current stage of implementation, and the nature of the national funding programmes that are being delivered. There are three elements of successful regeneration - social, economic and physical. Elswick benefits from both a New Deal for Communities (NDC) partnership as well as other capital investment including funding from Bridging NewcastleGateshead (BNG), the housing market renewal (HMR) partnership for Newcastle and Gateshead. As a consequence, intervention in this area is effectively tackling problems with both the physical structure of the area and underlying socio-economic problems. Renewal in the Scotswood Benwell and Walker areas, both of which are key intervention areas for the HMR pathfinder is primarily focused on physical regeneration. However, the spatial plans have identified priorities for social and economic regeneration and programmes such as Newcastle Futures are being aligned with them. The market renewal programme is still at a relatively early stage in its implementation, and as such significant amounts of acquisitions, clearance and refurbishments, aimed at stabilising the market, have been completed but few new homes have been constructed to date. In Elswick on the other hand, some of the major physical works such as the refurbishment of the Cruddas Park tower blocks are only just starting but the social, environmental and economic elements of renewal have been delivered over the last nine years. As a result the experience of regeneration within these neighbourhoods varies considerably.
- 42** Community capacity has increased in Elswick as a result of NDC funded regeneration, but this has happened to a lesser extent in the other areas. In Scotswood, where the community had become fragmented 560 residents have been re-housed, 340 of them choosing to move out of the area, resulting in the remaining community being consolidated in sustainable areas. In Walker there has been some good engagement in plan-making but there is a risk of this leading to frustration and cynicism as progress with delivering developments after this planning has so far been slow. In Elswick residents are represented on the NDC Board giving them the capacity to influence decisions, and they have become adept at supporting local projects and working with statutory agencies. The NDC community regeneration team is made up from six local residents employed by NDC to work with the community. Elswick NDC also has an asset-based strategy for its continuation beyond the end of NDC funding in 2010. The impact of these actions is to promote the engagement of local residents in the future direction of regeneration plans in their areas. In Walker and Scotswood/Benwell residents are members of Strategic Steering Groups and are supported in their local networks by Community Development Staff.

How good is the service?

- 43** In some neighbourhoods there is a lack of community facilities and shops which has been identified in the Action Plans. In Elswick there is a vibrant community, and some busy shopping areas along main roads. In Scotswood Benwell significant reductions in the number of void houses and investment in a new Council customer service centre and a new health centre is supporting the viability of the district centre, though the number of vacant commercial units needs to be reduced. The present shopping centre in Walker has large numbers of empty units, poor quality and choice of shops, and an unwelcoming atmosphere. As a result these neighbourhoods continue to present a poor image, with reduced opportunities for local residents to enjoy an improved quality of life until the improvement plans are delivered.
- 44** The Council has worked with LIFTCo to deliver two phases of new community buildings through the LIFT programme combining health, social care and local authority library and customer services in community based facilities. This includes ongoing discussions with the PCT regarding opportunities for the co-location and/or integration of services and with LIFTCo regarding the potential delivery of other facilities through the programme.
- 45** One of the biggest issues facing Newcastle is the collapse of the housing market in some areas over a period of two decades, which has affected large areas of the inner city resulting in areas of abandonment and low demand. The core aim of the market renewal programme is to re-stimulate demand through market restructuring and renewal. In Scotswood earlier piecemeal attempts address the situation failed, and the decision was therefore made to go for large scale demolition as only such a radical solution would solve the problem of market collapse, reputational damage and community image. The clearances in Scotswood are now almost complete after eight years, leaving a large area of vacant land, which subject to market conditions represents a major development opportunity. No new housing has yet been built though much of the preparatory master planning, consultation has now been completed. In addition, there are very few shops or facilities in Scotswood. Scotswood remains an area of significant deprivation, and one whose current image will not help attract inward migration of people to create new communities.
- 46** The plan for Walker is to achieve a sustainable balance of housing tenure in the area by increasing choice and affordability through a programme of selective demolition and new house building. At this stage there has been considerable demolition as it is necessary to assemble sites large enough to be attractive to developers. There are a number of cleared sites, and boarded-up houses awaiting demolition. New houses have been provided on three sites with the larger of these being Rivers Gate and the Cambrian development. Early phases of housing development on these sites have been completed but due to the downturn in the housing market, later phases are not progressing. Whilst there have been some improvements to the environment through the development of 'pocket parks', the lack of progress on the new district centre, the closure of shops and facilities such as post offices and pubs, and the uncertainty caused by the renegotiation of the business plan means that the future of Walker is not clear.

47 Improvements to existing housing across the city are being delivered effectively. Your Homes Newcastle, the Council's arms length housing management organisation, was judged by the Audit Commission in June 2008 to be providing an excellent service, which has excellent prospects for improvement. The Council is on track to meet the decent home standard by 2011. It has taken a phased approach to housing improvements but this year is starting to deliver the second phase package of improvements to homes to meet the required decent homes standard. The Council has declared a private sector housing renewal area in Elswick and is also working with private landlords in Elswick through the introduction of model tenant's agreements, to make improvements and reduce voids. This ensures that all residents are benefiting from housing improvements.

Responding to users and residents

- 48** The Council has generally good arrangements for consulting and engaging with residents on its regeneration plans in neighbourhoods. Both the area action plans for Walker and for Scotswood Benwell, and the agreed plans for a new 'Heart of Walker' comprising retail and community facilities, were subject to detailed and imaginative consultation. In Walker a two day place-making event was held where architects worked alongside teams of residents and stakeholders to develop the options for the 'Heart of Walker'. In Scotswood Benwell stakeholders were involved in determining the key challenges and opportunities for the area in advance of formal consultation. Good use is made of surveys, data and consultation to understand needs and identify and address barriers to regeneration. Other strengths include the dedicated communications team in Elswick NDC which has led to a very high level of awareness of the NDC projects and impact on the area.
- 49** Services across the city are becoming more accessible through an increased presence in communities. For example Neighbourhood Services have introduced twelve neighbourhood response managers over the last four years. This provides a point of contact for residents and councillors with environmental issues. In Elswick there is close working between the NDC project, the Police, the Anti Social Behaviour co-ordinator and the housing manager to tackle issues locally. University students, as part of their degree, work with the Police in Elswick each year to promote community cohesion. A particularly good example this year is development of a street sports programme for all the community. In Benwell and Scotswood Neighbourhood Wardens are improving opportunities for the Council to work with the community, including a Junior Wardens project for primary school children which encourages pride in the area and understanding of community issues among the young.

How good is the service?

- 50** There are examples of good and improving consultation and engagement in regeneration areas. The UDecide project aims to increase citizen participation by enabling residents to take part in discussions and decisions on a wide range of community projects and encourages contact between the city's different residential groups. It won a Eurocities award in 2008 for innovative engagement for a pilot project where children were given a budget and encouraged to decide how to spend it. There is also a generally improving relationship with the business community across the city as a result of a more proactive approach by the Council, although engagement with businesses locally, particularly small businesses is not always effective. The Older People Partnership hosted by Age Concern provides good arrangements to gain the views of older people to influence decisions.
- 51** The Council is proactively assessing the impact of the credit crunch and economic downturn on local people and businesses. For some time now a regular meeting has taken place of appropriately senior people to identify issues and explore solutions and opportunities in the light of the economic downturn. This has helped identify where some of the greatest increases in demands on service are enabling the Council and partners to improve co-ordination and resourcing to support for example homelessness. It is also enabling an informed and risk based approach to exploring how it can adapt plans.
- 52** However, there are also weaknesses in communication and engagement. Engagement with the voluntary sector is inconsistent which means the Council is missing out on information about community needs in deprived areas. Communication is not always sufficiently timely, which means residents are not up to date about plans. In particular the Council is not good at communicating changes to plans effectively such as the reasons for the delay to the Scotswood 'Expo', and this can lead to mistrust and rumour. The Council does not always complete the consultation process by explaining outcomes resulting from consultation to those who took part. It is not always clear whether a sufficient cross-section of the community, including groups at risk of exclusion, have been engaged. There are sometimes gaps in communication and information sharing which can lead to frustration on the part of community representatives, for example the lack of contact with Elswick NDC from the Excelsior Academy before it opened.

Diversity and fair access

- 53** The Council demonstrates a strong corporate commitment to diversity and fair access to services with some good local examples of working with disadvantaged groups but its approach is not sufficiently consistent. The Council has achieved Level 4 of the Equality Standard for local government, has an Equalities Committee with senior leadership, and a set of strategies and action plans for tackling inequality and exclusion. It has prioritised a reduction in child poverty as a key challenge for the city, and Beacon status is now agreed. The Social Inclusion strategy sets out how it will make sure that services and opportunities are accessible to everyone, including the most vulnerable, and a Community Cohesion strategy explains the approach to ensuring communities get on well with one another. The October 2007 inspection of the Council's Supporting People programme assessed the programme as 2 stars with promising prospects for improvement. The report noted the progress made in identifying the housing related support needs of vulnerable people and the robust structures that were in place to deliver further improvements. The Council has recognised the gaps in responding to diverse housing needs. The Council has recently signed a Local Employment Partnership with Job Centre Plus which has led to early success. However, in some local regeneration initiatives it is not clear how some disadvantaged groups are being targeted, and this limits the Council's ability to respond to the needs of all the community, and integrate communities.
- 54** The Council is developing a consistent approach to equality and diversity. There are some good examples of initiatives which address the needs of diverse communities. The recently opened Nunsmoor community centre is regularly used by a wide range of ethnic groups and nationalities, half of its users are from the BME community, and it has many East European users, plus Arabic speakers who are provided with an Arabic speaking play worker. In Elswick the housing service has identified housing needs of Chinese elders and the Bangladeshi community, and is starting to address private housing standards in an area with a significant Czech Roma community. Support has been provided to Hamjoli, a group of South Asian women, the Polish community, and a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community centre. The scope remains to ensure these positive local examples are replicated in a coherent and consistent way across the Newcastle area.

Priority neighbourhoods

- 55** The Council with its partners has identified five strategic commission areas as priorities for regeneration; these are the most deprived communities in Newcastle. We have assessed three of these neighbourhoods during the inspection - Walker, Scotswood Benwell and Elswick - the other two being Byker Ouseburn and North Central. Further details of findings in these neighbourhoods are attached as Appendix 1.

How good is the service?

Benefiting the most disadvantaged

- 56** The Council has had some success in ensuring that people are not disadvantaged by the regeneration process. A multi-agency approach has led to good support being provided to residents in Scotswood Benwell who are being relocated due to demolition, including an allocated officer for support and advice during the transition and an allowance of up to £3,000 to assist with the move. The Council has provided affected residents with choice in the location, type and tenure of housing. In Walker the Council agreed the 'The Walker Promise' which sets out how local residents and businesses affected by the redevelopment of Walker will be consulted, assisted and supported, and residents will be given their choice of housing in the area if they have to move. Of the 265 Walker residents who have moved, 80 per cent have stayed within Walker. Of the 561 Scotswood residents who have moved, 218 (39 per cent) have remained within Scotswood, 101 (18 per cent) have moved to Fenham, and 77 (14 per cent) have moved to Benwell. The others have relocated to other parts of the city. Neighbours have been able to move together where this was what they wanted. This has helped ensure a preserved sense of community within Walker.
- 57** Deprivation and exclusion are successfully being addressed in other ways. The Council's social inclusion strategy is targeting nine priority groups, including those excluded by location, for improvements in access to services. The Agencies against Racism Crime and Harassment (ARCH) partnership has successfully dealt with community tensions in Scotswood and Walker. Children's services can show that it is the most deprived children whose educational outcomes are improving the most. Newcastle Futures who provide pathways to work target incapacity benefit claimants, lone parents, homeless people, ex offenders, black and minority ethnic people, and workless families. Building Futures East, based in Walker, is tackling worklessness in deprived communities through mentoring and training to increase employability.
- 58** However, there are some areas where the Council has been less successful. Despite the support provided to residents, the change process is still seen as difficult because it is very lengthy, information is not always available, and it has led to uncertainty and distress in some cases. Support to businesses affected by regeneration has not always been successful. Businesses can get involved through local project boards and business forums set up with the chamber of commerce, and there is some practical support with accommodation requirements and advice. However, some local businesses think the Council has insufficient understanding of the pressures on small business to be able to deal with their needs effectively. For example, in relocating businesses from the Whitehouse Centre in Scotswood the Council has not properly understood the impact on business of removing access to shared equipment. Some of the few businesses which remain in the Centre feel disadvantaged and some have moved out or closed.

Service outcomes for users and the community

- 59** The Council has had mixed success in closing the gap between its most deprived neighbourhoods and the city average, and between the city and national figures. In 2004 Newcastle was the 20th most deprived out of 354 local authority areas, and by 2007, it was only 37th most deprived. Although not directly comparable indicators, this is positive direction of travel. Across the city crime has fallen, educational attainment has improved, but the gap has not narrowed on health and economic indicators.
- 60** Of the three neighbourhoods reviewed, Elswick has closed the gap with the city average, Scotswood Benwell and Walker have improved but at broadly the same rate as the overall progress of the city so the gap has remained the same. The Council's Vitality Index is a basket of quality of life indicators used to compare neighbourhoods for the period from 2001 to 2007, on the themes of crime, health, education, housing, income and worklessness. Elswick has been successful in closing the gap with the city average on all key indicators, and is the only NDC area in the country to have achieved this. The gap between Elswick and the city average in percentage points has reduced from 44 to 26 on unemployment, from 18 to 13 on health, from 17 to 14 on education. Scotswood Benwell is a different picture: although there is an overall improvement, it is largely consistent with city performance rather than narrowing the gap, which has only narrowed from 23 points to 22 points. In Walker there has been little progress relative to city averages on most key indicators although performance does vary from year to year. In both Scotswood Benwell and Walker educational achievement has improved substantially during this period but in Walker this has not been at a consistent rate or with a consistently positive trend. In 2004 GCSE performance in Walker was above city averages but has now fallen back to two thirds of that level, though it remains well above achievement levels recorded in 2001.
- 61** The Council is not delivering on new housing development and is behind target both citywide and in deprived neighbourhoods. There has been more progress in the regeneration of Elswick, where the NDC project has been running for nine years, through a combination of physical, environmental, social and economic initiatives. In Scotswood demolition is almost complete but no new houses have been built, and plans are now being readjusted as a result of the recession, further delaying delivery. In Walker some new homes have been provided but further developments are subject to delay, and plans for schools, shops and improved leisure and open space are still in development. However, it should be noted that the HMR pathfinder through the Council's delivery teams has achieved the majority of targets agreed with Communities and Local Government (CLG), and has been assessed as performing strongly. During 2007/08 less land was acquired than originally anticipated, due to negotiations over one parcel of land taking longer than expected, but all other outputs targets were exceeded. In particular, the number of demolitions far exceeded the target for the year.

How good is the service?

62 The Council is working with partners to provide pathways to work with some success, as follows.

- Newcastle Futures has been in operation since April 2007 offering advice and support to economically inactive residents in deprived areas to help them get back to work. This supplements the mainstream services from Job Centre Plus and training providers. They have so far registered 2,978 residents, of whom 1,282 have been assisted into work, with 70 per cent of them remaining in work after 13 weeks.
- Building Futures East operates in Walker and aims specifically to provide entry level training and pathways to work to disadvantaged people living in the east end of Newcastle. It has a good conversion rate with 71 per cent of students gaining a qualification, and 29 per cent moving into a job.
- Your Homes Newcastle is starting to provide increased employment and training opportunities for young people through its worklessness strategy, building on work experience for school students.
- The Council also runs the Shop for Jobs service, based in Eldon Square, which provides pre employment training for people interested in jobs in retailing.
- Elswick NDC invested over £7 million in employment and training projects, supporting 31 new business start ups, 14 new community enterprises, 1,459 have received qualifications as a result of training, and 826 residents have been helped into employment.

63 The result of these actions is to promote the opportunities for accessing skills and work of people living within the local area.

Satisfaction image and perception

64 The Council is being successful in improving community satisfaction with local areas. Resident surveys show that people in deprived areas think things are changing for the better but they are not yet as good as in other areas. Overall satisfaction with the City as place to live is high at 75 per cent in 2007. In the three neighbourhoods resident satisfaction is higher than the city average for changes made to the area, ability to influence decisions, and opportunity for participation, but lower than the city average for satisfaction with the local area as a place to live, satisfaction with choice of housing in the area, and feeling safe when outside in the local area after dark.

65 Resident satisfaction is generally high and increasing in Elswick and Walker, but below the city average in Scotswood Benwell. This is not surprising given the stage that regeneration is at in Scotswood. Satisfaction with the quality of services is generally higher in Elswick than the city average, with the exception of environmental services such as recycling. In Walker satisfaction with the quality of services is higher than the city average for all services except parks and open spaces and public transport. In Scotswood Benwell satisfaction with the quality of services is close to the city average except for recycling, parks and open spaces, and sports and leisure facilities where satisfaction is noticeably lower. In Elswick where a MORI survey has been carried out every two years by the NDC starting in 2002, there has been a considerable and sustained improvement in resident satisfaction over a six year period, such as satisfaction with the area as a place to live having increased from 63 per cent in 2002 to 79 per cent in 2008.

Is the service delivering value for money?

66 The Council exceeds its efficiency targets every year and has devised a savings plan for next year which will deliver savings of £18.6 million without any planned impact on services. The Council has a good record on accessing external funding to support its objectives, including in partnership with others, such as the housing market renewal pathfinder, and the recently announced growth point funding for accelerated housing development. Elswick NDC levered in large amounts of funding in addition to its NDC grant resulting in it becoming the highest spending NDC project in the country. It has also put in place a succession plan through investment in property to provide future income to support projects in Elswick. As part of its budget plan for the next year the Council intends to use prudential borrowing to fund an additional £20 million of capital expenditure to support regeneration projects such as the Scotswood Expo, highway and infrastructure works, and additional support to Your Homes Newcastle to enable them to buy up new houses for social renting.

How good is the service?

67 However the Council does not systematically assess what it spends on neighbourhood regeneration, and is therefore not well placed to assess the value for money it is getting or to compare the costs and benefits of different approaches to regeneration. The Council's bid for Local Enterprise Grant Initiative (LEGI) was not successful but the Council is building on the work done for the bid and looking for alternative ways of funding its enterprise growth programme. This includes recently securing £1.56 million of European Funding matched with £2 million of the Council's resources to deliver its enterprise support package. The Council makes good use of Section 106 contributions to fund highways, schools and affordable housing development, but these are likely to reduce in future given the economic downturn. More could be done to benefit local people and businesses through arranging for them to benefit from investment and construction in the area, and through encouraging recruitment from disadvantaged groups. The Council has put in place a comprehensive customer service network involving co-location with other agencies but has not systematically reviewed its community facilities and buildings in partnership with other agencies to identify opportunities for co-location. As a result, the opportunity to maximise the outcomes delivered from Council, and partners, resources at a local level is reduced. Opportunities for joint delivery of common outcomes may be missed, as resources become tighter in future, the efficiency with which spending is used will become crucial in promoting outcomes.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

68 This second judgment looks to assess and balance:

- the track record of delivery by the Council in the assessed service;
- the strategic visioning and performance management processes relating to the service; AND
- the capacity of the Council to improve the service.

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

69 The Council has a mixed track record of delivery on neighbourhood regeneration. The pace of change is slow which is frustrating for both local residents and partners. Whilst progress has been made over the longer term in some areas and themes, the overall track record of improvement is disappointing.

70 Regeneration started in Elswick in 2000 and considerable change has been brought about which is recognised by residents and users. There has been a sustained reduction in crime and anti social behaviour, a reduction in unemployment and benefit claimants, improvements in educational performance, and a number of environmental and housing improvements. These are reflected in the increased satisfaction ratings from residents of the area from 2001 onwards.

71 The Council's track record of delivery in Scotswood Benwell is mixed. There is a legacy of failed attempts at regeneration. There have been previous demolition schemes and new building but the new houses were never occupied and subsequently were also demolished. Since the start of the more comprehensive approach to redevelopment through the housing market renewal pathfinder, demolitions have continued but no new houses have yet been built. However, there are some positives.

- The demolitions in the area have been well managed with a quick transition from housing to temporary open space, and well supported by the neighbourhood management initiative.
- The opening of the Excelsior Academy in September 2008 was the first real sign of delivery in the area.
- In Benwell, Canning Primary School has been refurbished, the customer service centre has opened and a new health centre is on site. A programme of housing renewal supported by the neighbourhood management initiative has significantly improved market and community confidence.
- Land assembly is now almost complete, although the Expo is now likely to need re-evaluation because of the impact of the recession on the housing market.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- The Council remains committed to the plans for the Scotswood 'Expo' and determined to progress with the appointment of a joint venture partner for the longer term development of the area. A firm agreement with partners and realistic plans for the 'Expo' are important in building confidence in the Council's ability to deliver.

72 The track record of effectively implementing change in Walker is mixed, and the Council has now decided to review its approach both in terms of the commercial arrangements and business plan, and also its strategy for the area and governance arrangements. The original intention for Walker was a major rebuild similar to Scotswood Benwell but this was scaled back following resident consultation to a piecemeal approach. The impact of the recession on the housing market has led the Council to rescale plans and is renegotiating with its partners the commercial arrangements for delivery. Whilst residents are enthusiastic about the plans for the area, and consultation and engagement have generated goodwill, residents are now becoming frustrated and demoralised by the lack of progress.

73 Businesses find processes involving the Council are slow and cumbersome and lack clarity and co-ordination. This sometimes makes it difficult to access the right information, guidance or judgements. The Council does not have a track record of making timely changes. Opportunities can be missed because funding decisions are not made quickly enough; there has been a tendency to continue to fund existing programmes rather than undertake timely reviews to make improvements. The changes to funding arrangements from NRF to WNF were an example of this, however the review of NRF projects has now been completed to develop a new WNF operational programme. Some staff working on regeneration are not clear about future Council plans. Whilst the pace of change can be frustrating for local businesses, the voluntary sector and for staff working on regeneration, there is some evidence of an improving track record of making change in a partnership context.

How well does the service manage performance?

74 The Council has improved the clarity of its strategy for regeneration, having updated it as part of its new SCS and LAA. Area land use plans for neighbourhoods are in place for Walker and Scotswood but may need to be re-visited following the economic downturn. In late 2008 the Council's LDF Core strategy was withdrawn as the inspector did not consider the Council's evidence base to be sufficiently robust. This was because it did not include a strategic housing land availability assessment, a strategic housing market assessment, or a waste strategy. This does not affect the area action plans but impacts on the Council's reputation as a development partner, and will require additional work to be undertaken to strengthen the evidence base. The Council's housing strategy also needs to be refreshed and updated. The Council is in the process of developing an economic assessment and masterplan jointly with Gateshead Council, and has recently produced draft action plans on enterprise and employability. Whilst these strategies and plans are all at different stages of development, some more recent than others, it is difficult to assess whether economic, social and environmental progress are in balance and will produce more balanced and sustainable communities

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 75** The Council has clear plans for the future development of the neighbourhoods under review. In Elswick the refurbishment of the Cruddas Park flats is about to start, and the NDC project has advanced plans for supporting its continuance through an asset based legacy strategy. In Scotswood Benwell there are plans for a 'housing expo' to showcase the development potential of the area and raise aspirations. A design competition has been held attracting 150 responses from architectural practices but the overall project is now likely to be re-evaluated because of the impact of the recession. In Walker in addition to the plans for new housing, the Council is developing a plan for a new heart of Walker neighbourhood centre, supported by new primary and secondary schools. However, plans are not consistently integrated and co-ordinated. For example plans for tackling health inequalities are not part of regeneration plans. It is not clear what the Council's corporate or local economic development strategy is, or how it is planned to contribute to the improved prosperity of deprived neighbourhoods. The result is that there exists the opportunity for confusion, and also the risk that outcomes being delivered through different plans may be inconsistent, or contradictory.
- 76** Improved delivery mechanisms are being put in place. Starting at the highest level in the Council, a new Regeneration Delivery Board has been set up to replace previous corporate arrangements and with the intention of having a greater focus on delivery and increased pace. The Council is starting to coordinate its own and partners actions to deliver wide-ranging regeneration outcomes. The new Board was established in October 2007, but it did not work effectively and in January 2009 was reconstituted with revised membership and terms of reference. This is important in ensuring that in future clear consistent leadership of regeneration is given by the Council.
- 77** The Council does not have effective delivery chains in place across all areas. Whilst stronger delivery chains are evident in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour through the integration of neighbourhood wardens and anti-social behaviour co-ordinators into local police and community safety activity; weaknesses are apparent in:
- economic development, where there is activity at a local level but a lack of linkages to strategy; and
 - housing, where strategy targets are not being met, and an assessment has only recently been carried out in relation to new build targets on a site by site to assess what is deliverable.
- 78** Corporate aims and strategies have recently been translated into theme and area action plans. The Council is now developing effective performance management arrangements to drive progress in regeneration. There is a review currently in progress which is assessing and bringing together all the regeneration targets from the various Council, and partnership strategies such as the SCS, the LAA and the Regeneration Strategy, and developing longer term targets for the SCS. Once this has been done it will be easier to make the links between the high level ambitions and the local and short term targets, and it will be easier for the Council and partners to see where progress is being made, and targets are being met, and where it is not. This will make performance management more effective.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 79** The Council's new corporate performance management system has recently been introduced and is being developed to become a more comprehensive management tool over the coming year. It is currently being used to track performance against national indicators and some local indicators and reports to senior management and Council leadership. By the end of the year it is anticipated that it will also be used to track progress on service action plans and to link to the neighbourhood level. Currently monitoring at the neighbourhood level is only possible through a manual process bringing together information held by individual service managers. Consequently whilst corporate reporting arrangements appear sound there is no comprehensive and regular reporting at the neighbourhood level making a comprehensive picture of success or otherwise difficult to find.
- 80** Many action plans are not SMART and do not include reference to outcomes which can be measured. The new Area Based Regeneration Director is drawing up a service action plan and outcomes framework which will make the connections from the SCS down to local level for the short and long term, but this is still in development. Many Council plans are only capable of being monitored at a city-wide level which leads to weaknesses in performance management and governance at local delivery boards. Programme and project management boards manage delivery of projects and programmes at the neighbourhood level but existing systems are not tracking overall outcomes at the area level. Consequently there is no consolidated reporting at that level.
- 81** The Council is beginning to develop a model of neighbourhood management and community empowerment. This includes a 'Neighbourhood Charter', the approach to which has been piloted in Fawdon ward. Previously in Newcastle there have been ward committees for each of the 26 wards, supported by a ward co-ordinator. This has now been developed into a neighbourhood model although still operating at ward level. The neighbourhood charter is a form of ward plan, based on residents' views of the issues and priorities for the area, and structured to reflect the six challenges facing Newcastle as set out in the SCS. It is also described as a ward-based local service agreement between the Council, its partners and the community. It is intended that the Charters will enhance co-ordination of services at a local level. It is planned to have 26 draft charters by the summer of 2009, and for the approach to be fully rolled out by April 2010. It is not clear how this will impact on governance arrangements in the strategic commission areas, for which new outline arrangements have been agreed. These place more emphasis on effective and streamlined decision making to speed delivery.
- 82** Following a restructure last year, the Newcastle Partnership is now structured more effectively to focus on delivery. The Delivery Board, meeting every six weeks, is chaired by the Council's Chief Executive. Beneath it sit five delivery partnerships covering the five themes of the SCS. All targets in the LAA are allocated to a delivery partnership that is responsible for achieving them. The partnership's new performance management framework includes a quarterly performance report which is presented to each of the delivery partnerships, and they in turn each make a report to the Delivery Board on their progress. LAA targets are regularly reviewed by the Chief Executive of the Council, and remedial actions are set for any which are not performing. This ensures that there is a focus on achieving the targets.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 83** The Council has put a culture change programme in place to deliver a 'One Council approach'. This follows a 2007 Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) review which recommended both structural and cultural changes to deliver improvements, particularly in relation to delivering the regeneration programme. This aims to develop a 'can do' approach through visible leadership and developing positive behaviours, improved processes, learning, performance, project and programme management and a more collaborative approach. A 'One Council' improvement plan has been produced but it is not clear how much progress has been made. This will also be linked into the Council's transformation programme through which the Council, working with a strategic partner is aiming to deliver savings of £18 million in 2009/10 mainly through management and administrative restructuring, and so improving value for money.
- 84** There is a perception amongst the Council's partners of improving leadership at corporate and strategic level, but not at a local level, where recruitment is still underway. The Council is showing good leadership through its relationship with the business community and other partners such as the universities. It has worked with the other owners of Eldon Square to ensure that the expansion plans are viable and being implemented, are supporting house builders through plans to buy up unsold new houses for social rent, are appointing four debt counsellors to help people avoid getting into financial difficulties which can lead to repossession, are being more proactive in increasing take up of business rate relief, and is raising £21 million in the coming year through council tax to fund key regeneration and infrastructure projects. The Council have a good relationship with the chamber of commerce and the city centre partnership, which has been important to support the successful Business Improvement District bid.
- 85** There is a lack of coordination across Directorates and services in Newcastle which is apparent when looking at regeneration services in neighbourhoods. Senior and middle managers do not know what is happening in other service areas. Examples include neighbourhood services not being properly linked to the regeneration programme; and poor coordination of parallel workstreams such as community development. In some instances there is good delivery and joint working on the ground, but in other cases different staff working in a common neighbourhood do not meet together. This results in the Council getting less benefit for local people from its resources than it would if they were efficiently coordinated and managed.
- 86** The Council is starting to take opportunities to learn from elsewhere. One example of this is in relation to teenage pregnancy, a key issue for the City, where partners visited Liverpool which has a similar culture and problem with teenage pregnancy but has managed to significantly reduce numbers in recent years. The Liverpool approach was based on an accessible contraception service, and advice provided by staff with a youth service background. Following this visit, Newcastle changed their approach from support to prevention, set up an outreach team, and mounted an award winning social marketing campaign aimed at teenage girls through a teen magazine format which gave information about contraception, and the experience of becoming a teenage mother. The Council now has good information about teenage pregnancy in the city, and is designing future campaigns on this basis.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

87 The Council has taken a lead in addressing and mitigating the impact of the recession in Newcastle. It has recognised that it can play a useful role in continuing to invest through its capital programme to support the local economy. It is also taking action to minimise the risk of repossessions and local business failures through more provision of debt counselling, and a more proactive approach to business rate relief. Other possible interventions under discussion include rescheduling development schemes to bring forward the Council's contribution, buying up unsold new houses for social renting, and improving housing options and affordability in regeneration areas such as Walker.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

88 The Council is restructuring to deliver regeneration more effectively. The formation of the new Environment and Regeneration directorate has brought together many services for the first time which previously worked in silos such as housing, planning transport and localised services. The restructure aimed to clarify roles and responsibilities, strengthen leadership and bring a stronger focus on delivery by improving performance, project and programme management particularly in relation to Area Based Regeneration (ABR). The planning service is still being reorganised to ensure greater focus on the delivery of Council priorities. The new focus on area based regeneration through the appointment of a Director of ABR will strengthen this. However, economic development and property services remain within the Chief Executive's department. This has been judged appropriate for the short term by the Council to provide leadership and support to the new structures but in the medium to longer term a more co-ordinated approach to effective delivery may be achieved by integrating this team into the main regeneration department. Adult Services are looking to work better across the Council by increasing links with regeneration, and linking to ward committees. This should help maximise the impetus across Council activities to support regeneration outcomes.

89 Local area teams are committed and deliver good services. Environmental rapid response teams are good, and neighbourhood wardens provide a good level presence in the area. Services are good at working together locally for example their response to clear substation graffiti. The Council is increasing its capacity to respond to local need for more effective neighbourhood management although there is very limited scope to invest additional permanent resources. Dedicated development capacity is limited and is focused on embedding neighbourhood management into the day to day operations of the Council. Support to Members and communities will be reconfigured as necessary through a review of community support resources.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 90** There is good commitment from front line staff to deliver improvement but there is also uncertainty caused by restructuring and change programmes. Regeneration staff recognise that there has been a lot of good strategy development, but are aware that there needs to be more focus on delivering actual improvements in communities. Changes of administration and management in recent years have not helped to maintain focus and there is uncertainty around the current restructure implications. Internal processes and decision making takes too long; complex processes and bureaucracy cause delays. This has resulted in delay. Greater responsibility could be delegated to staff to make decisions and provide local leadership, with a consequent speeding up of the delivery of outcomes, and the possibility that local outcomes can be delivered for local people.
- 91** The Council is strengthening its arrangements and approach to leadership and delivery of area based regeneration. The Council's organisational development function is actively supporting transformation, and access to training and development has improved. The Council has taken steps to improve the skills and capacity to better manage the regeneration programme, and the new Area Based Regeneration (ABR) team has a better skills mix and is better linked in to the support and challenge available at the corporate level. This will be needed to provide leadership to a corporate approach to regeneration delivery.
- 92** Progress in regenerating Newcastle's most deprived neighbourhoods has been hampered by a lack of drive to secure positive outcomes. Repeated changes of direction have slowed progress. There is a lack of shared ownership of regeneration plans by local councillors. In some neighbourhoods local ward councillors do not share or own the vision for the area. In other neighbourhoods they feel they are not fully involved. The new model of governance for area based regeneration has the potential to enhance local leadership required for successful area based regeneration and it is important that this opportunity is not lost if outcomes for deprived communities are to be improved more quickly than in the past.
- 93** The Council needs to find savings in its mainstream revenue budget, underlining the importance of bringing in additional finance to support regeneration activities. The Council is generally successful at bringing in external finance, and has recently bid for additional ERDF funding to support its enterprise programme, and to the community infrastructure fund to support the housing market renewal pathfinder. The designation of Newcastle and Gateshead as a housing growth point has also brought in additional finance.
- 94** The Council is not fully maximising the wider community benefits from developers through the use of section 106 agreements or its procurement processes. It uses developer contributions to fund projects such as highways, schools and affordable housing but has not for example ensured construction projects use a significant proportion of local apprentices or that new businesses train and employ local people. Therefore opportunities to maximise the potential of developments or procurements is not secured.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 95** The Council is increasing its capacity through partnerships in many ways. For example the Council works effectively with BNG to deliver on regeneration improvements. In terms of finance, BNG has £95 million of resources in its current three year business plan 2008 to 2011, and an additional sum for the housing Growth Point. It also has access to skills, and uses consultants where it does not have the capacity in-house; to carry out research into the housing market, and talk to developers and lenders, in order to tailor what is offered in the pathfinder areas. The Council has also increased capacity through more appropriate partnership working with the voluntary and community sector. The Council is also working with partners to ensure a simplified and less confusing approach to the delivery of business support. Business Link North East and the Council are developing complementary roles and support for businesses.
- 96** There is good partnership working in the city but it is not consistent. The development of the Brewery site which is to become Science City is an example of good partnership working between BNG, the Council, Newcastle University, and One North East. However, partners identify that local regeneration boards have different levels of effectiveness, particularly in moving from strategy to delivery. Pace in partnership working is seen by some partners are being hampered by the Council. Relations with the Primary care Trust (PCT) are now improving following previous difficulties: regular meetings are taking place at a senior level but partnership working has not yet extended to joint commissioning of services. Coordination and communication of work programmes can also be poor locally between different agencies. All of these issues do not inspire confidence in partners to commit to delivery.
- 97** In Cruddas Park, a fully integrated private public partnership has been set up to deliver market renewal and new build through a multi-use regeneration project, and work has just started on this. The partnership will have an on-going long term commitment to management, maintenance and community well-being. The scheme will provide a balanced social and housing mix, a new technology network, and the creation of training, education and employment opportunities.
- 98** The Council is proposing to use a modern approach to procurement in respect of new housing in Scotswood Benwell, but current economic conditions are impacting adversely on progress. The plan is to procure a strategic private sector development partner to provide development and management expertise, financial advice and access to funding over a ten year period to undertake the transformation with the Council and partners. A competitive procurement dialogue with three potential partners started in May 2008 but general pessimism about market conditions and increased aversion to market and financial risk on the part of the bidders has delayed the process and as a result the preferred partner will not be selected until June 2009, six months later than originally planned. This impacts on all events including the 'Expo'. It also puts additional pressures on the public purse if it is to fund the early delivery of infrastructure works. Procuring a development partner is key to attracting interest and investment and beginning to overcome negative perceptions of the area.

Appendix 1 – Neighbourhood case studies

Walker

- 1 Walker riverside is an area of 314 hectares to the east of the city centre, where population fell by 40 per cent from 1971 to 2001, and is now home to 13,000 people. The Council describes it as an area needing significant intervention following the demise of its shipbuilding and loss of population, in order to ensure its communities are sustainable and it has a successful future. Many people from Walker have moved and continue to move out to North Tyneside and Blyth Valley. Seventy three per cent of housing in Walker is social rented and only 22 per cent is owner occupied compared to 69 per cent nationally.
- 2 The Council has agreed a plan for creating a sustainable community in Walker. The Walker Riverside Area Action Plan (WRAAP) was adopted in April 2007 following extensive community engagement and consultation. The vision for Walker is:

“Over the next 10 to 15 years to gradually improve the local environment, housing, shops, schools, transport, education and health services to make Walker a vibrant local economy and location of choice for families to live, stay and work, now and in the future.”
(Walker Riverside Area Action Plan, April 2007)
- 3 The proposals for achieving this vision are principally through new housing development. Plans are to increase the population of the area, increase the number of families, increase the choice of housing available with a target of 80 per cent of new homes to be owner occupied, a new neighbourhood centre, retention of existing residents and attraction of new economically active people into the area, and to raise aspirations. Specific targets are to build 1,780 new homes by 2021 through partnerships with developers and house builders and to offer a range of tenures. There are also proposals for the new ‘Heart of Walker’ neighbourhood centre to provide new shops and community facilities located alongside a new primary school.
- 4 The Council aims to put the needs of residents at the heart of service delivery and ensure that they are not disadvantaged by the change process. The plans for Walker involve some demolition of low demand housing. The ‘Walker Promise’ was signed in September 2005, and aims to support local residents who are affected by redevelopment proposals to remain in the area with their choice of housing type and location. It includes consultation in advance of plans being agreed, compensation packages for owner occupiers and private tenants, undertakings about the number of times people will be required to move, and also the option to move out of the area to another part of the city if that is desired. So far, up to March 2009 214 households have been re-housed, all to a property of their choice.

Appendix 1 – Neighbourhood case studies

- 5** Progress with regeneration in Walker remains slow. Plans have been in development for many years, and a detailed plan for key sites was being delivered before the BNG pathfinder was set up in 2004. Although initially Walker was the furthest advanced of the BNG intervention areas, progress has subsequently slowed. Only 131 new homes have been completed by December 2008, of which 106 are occupied and 25 remain vacant. The new build homes are predominantly in two schemes at River's Gate and Hibernia village, and in both cases have been built through partnership arrangements. On both developments there is a range of tenures available including shared ownership and rent before you buy schemes. The completed houses have high design and sustainability standards and are modern and attractive compared to most housing in Walker. Nevertheless the take up of the properties has been slower than planned, and as the availability of bank finance decreased from 2008 the developers have become reluctant to progress with the next phase of each scheme until the current new properties are all taken. Furthermore two other sites - the Stack site and the allotments site - have also been delayed compared to original plans. However, as already stated, it should be noted that the HMR pathfinder has met most of the targets agreed with CLG, although this is likely to become more challenging as the recession deepens.
- 6** One of the key proposals in WRAAP is for a new 'Heart of Walker'. The Council and partners held consultation events for a month in March 2007 around the options for this neighbourhood centre and what residents wanted in their new centre. The chosen option is now being worked up into a Supplementary Planning Document for approval by the Council in 2009, and a delivery team is developing a business plan for the new development.
- 7** High levels of community engagement have been built into the Walker regeneration proposal from the outset, and the efficacy of these is regularly reviewed. There is a dedicated Walker community engagement team based in the area and available five days a week whose role is to support community champions and local residents, and to maintain communication with the community and stakeholders. The 'Walker Eye' is a well presented glossy colour newsletter delivered to all homes and businesses in the area three or four times a year, which is informative, invites people to get involved, and showcases developments and achievements. The annual Pride Passion Potential awards for outstanding contributions from the community encourage and recognise involvement. Whilst over 1,500 young people were involved in drawing up plans in 2007, a review of the community and stakeholder engagement strategy in 2008 identified a need for more involvement of young people.
- 8** The Walker Riverside industrial area is now home to a number of successful offshore companies. The Council is working with and encouraging these businesses who wish to expand in the area. A study of the north bank of the Tyne, including Walker and neighbouring Wallsend in North Tyneside is currently being undertaken by consultants for the two Councils in conjunction with One North East.

- 9** Other economic interventions in Walker appear limited and it is not clear what the Council's strategy for enhancing the economic prosperity of the area is. Walker has high levels of unemployment – five times the national average at a time of low unemployment in 2006. Walker residents do not easily access jobs in Newcastle city centre. The Council in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce carried out a skills survey among Walker businesses in April 2008 but it is not clear what happened as a result. It is also not clear whether sufficient support is available to local businesses, including small businesses that may be affected by the regeneration of the area, and whether business premises and advice are available in the area. However Building Futures East, based in Walker but serving the whole east end, is supported by the Council to deliver training in construction and other basic skills for those who are furthest from the labour market. This is a successful project with a high level of qualifications and employment resulting. Newcastle Futures, the Council's pathways to work partnership, also work in Walker, providing a weekly drop in session for people who are interested in finding work.
- 10** There are plans to improve both primary and secondary schools serving the Walker community. Improving primary education in regeneration areas is a priority to encourage families to the area. The Primary Strategy for Change sets out the Council's approach to improving primary education to meet 21st Century needs. This includes improving or replacing schools and facilities, removing surplus places, providing extended services, improving environmental sustainability, and improving school kitchens and sports facilities as a contribution to improving health. In Walker the proposal is to replace four existing schools with a high number of surplus places, suitability issues and in a poor condition with two schools better placed to meet future needs. Walker Technology College is also to be replaced on a nearby site as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme.
- 11** The Vitality measure shows Walker has kept pace with progress made in the City overall and the gap with the City trend has remained similar over the six year period to 2007. This reflects the stage that the regeneration of Walker is at - there has been considerable engagement in drawing up plans, but not many improvements that would be experienced by users yet. Residents of Walker are frustrated by the slow pace of regeneration, and perceive that some things are getting worse rather than better. A local bus route has been lost, the post office on Walker Road is closing, a number of pubs have closed, and there are 12 remaining shops open in the 16 units at Church Walk.

 - The latest resident survey (autumn 2007) shows that resident satisfaction is higher in Walker than the city average for changes made to the area, ability to influence decisions, and opportunity for participation. Satisfaction is lower than city average for the local area as a place to live, the choice of homes, parks and open spaces, and public transport accessibility.
 - The employment gap in Walker, whilst smaller than in Scotswood Benwell and Elswick in 2001, has got wider rather than narrower by 2007. The number of working age people claiming benefits is reducing but remains more than 50 per cent higher than the city average;

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- The health score, measuring mortality rates, has improved from 39.0 to 50.3, and the gap with the city has remained similar over the period. Teenage conception rates have fallen in Walker and were getting close to city average in 2003/04 to 2005/06 then increased again in 2004/05 to 2006/07. Over the four years to 2006/07, the gap between Walker and the City average reduced significantly, from 49.1 in 2002/03 to 23.3 in 2006/07. Overweight and obese children are above city average in both Reception and Year 6 but the gap is narrower in Year 6;
 - The Walker GCSE score improved dramatically from 21.3 per cent of children achieving five or more GCSE A* to C in 2001 to 50.0 per cent in 2004 but has since varied year on year and fell in 2007 such that the gap is now bigger in 2008 than it was in 2001 although the absolute results have improved.
- 12** The Council's approach to the regeneration of Walker is principally physically focused, and housing led. Whilst there are other elements of regeneration going on or planned to take place, such as the work on training and providing pathways to work, and the plans for the new shopping centre, there is a lack of a co-ordinated holistic approach. It is not clear what the economic and transport strategies are, or how it is planned to reduce health inequalities in the area. Given the slow progress on the physical regeneration, and the lack of a holistic approach, there is a risk of failure.
- 13** The Council, with partners, has now taken the positive step of reconsidering its programme for Walker, as a result of slow progress with delivery, compounded by the impact of the recession. Its review is addressing the commercial deal with its regeneration partner, Places for People, revising its business plan to address viability, costs and funding, refreshing its regeneration strategy so that it is comprehensive and links socio economic and physical interventions, and governance arrangements as part of its review of governance arrangements for all the strategic commission areas.

Scotswood Benwell

- 14** The Council's self assessment describes the Scotswood Benwell area in the west of Newcastle as experiencing one of the most extreme examples of housing market collapse in the country. Following three decades of decline it is now home to approximately 17,000 people, some 40 per cent fewer than previously.

- 15** In the past various interventions have been planned to regenerate the area to limited effect. There have been some successes, as a result of investments in improvements to sustainable housing and this has helped to stabilise both population and prices in some parts of the area. However, despite Council and partner efforts much of the housing continued to decline and the communities have remained amongst the most deprived in the city. The area is stigmatised making attracting developers and new people to the area difficult. In recognition of this the Council and partners intend developing a housing expo as a catalyst for wider regeneration, to stimulate the local market and capitalise on the natural geography of the area to create new sustainable communities integrated with those in the improved retained housing. Much of the abandoned housing has already been cleared and the previous community has dispersed. Compulsory purchase orders have been issued to complete the land assembly. The legacy of decline and demolition has resulted in a huge (80 hectares) brownfield area for redevelopment in close proximity to the city. But the reality for local people is that after some thirty years of decline other than clearance and reasonably maintained grassland there is little physical evidence of improvement.
- 16** The draft Benwell and Scotswood Area Action Plan has been developed with citizens and key stakeholders to meet their needs and aspirations for the area. It is based on a good understanding of local need and of factors which would influence new residents to locate into the area and remove existing barriers to relocation. This understanding is drawn from a range of data including surveys, socio-economic and environmental data as well as a range of consultation with local people, stakeholders and potential residents. Various reviews have been undertaken to update data and ensure that plans remain relevant.
- 17** Regeneration plans for the area are ambitious with a strong focus on physical regeneration, but this is connected to social and economic aspects. The plan is to build 2,200 mixed tenure new homes which will attract families back into the area. Plans seek to address local challenges including the poor external image, perceptions of the area, high levels of worklessness and to generate a long term commitment to the area from major stakeholders. Included in these is the provision of a new City Academy (named Excelsior) which is now complete and opened to students in September 2008. This is the first significant tangible evidence of a new beginning in the area. However, its significance is not fully recognised by local people in an environment which still lacks a critical mass of population and good housing, to sustain the necessary range of local services.
- 18** Engagement with the local community has improved through the various iterations of regeneration plans. Local people believe that they are kept reasonably up to date with plans and have the opportunity to challenge through a variety of media and forums. There has been a clear emphasis on engaging young people in developing plans and some evidence of actions and initiatives targeted specifically at the older members of the community. But it is not clear that all key existing or potential community groups have been well engaged including for example, students, ethnic minority groups and in particular ethnic minority business groups. Broad engagement helps ensure that the service meets the needs of current and future members of the community.

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- 19** A support programme has been put in place to minimise disadvantage to people in the areas undergoing transition. A partnership approach has been put in place to provide strategic neighbourhood management and to co-ordinate activities to contribute to improved outcomes. Support includes targeted interventions to assist communities such as diversionary activities for young people (examples include junior wardens) and interventions focused on the elderly population such as establishing no cold calling zones. A relocation and resettlement team has assisted those affected by clearances who can access a flexible relocation package which also enables owner occupiers to maintain that tenure even after the market has collapsed around them.
- 20** Local area teams are committed and deliver good services which local people value. Demolition in Benwell and Scotswood was well managed to maintain the environment. The transition from housing to temporary open areas was quick and steps have been taken to improve the environment for example, pocket parks were created in Benwell and in Scotswood the ground was top soiled and seeded immediately after demolition. In Scotswood the neighbourhood management initiative particularly targeted demolition areas to manage transition effectively. Environmental rapid response teams are effective; and local neighbourhood manager and community development workers provide excellent support to residents on a day to day basis. Minimising disadvantage during the change process is important in terms of sustaining communities.
- 21** Despite the slow progress on physical redevelopment there are some positive achievements in wider facets of regeneration. Neighbourhood Wardens were cited by residents as playing a key role in engendering local pride and understanding of local communities. The work they have done to engage positively with young people in particular was well recognised by the community. Residents credit constructive work through a private landlord's forum in Benwell with reducing local anti social behaviour problems. The way in which the Council works with partners to manage neighbourhoods is also perceived positively. These have all improved the areas for local people and this is reflected in a reduced the number of voids.
- 22** In terms of narrowing the gap between Scotswood Benwell and the rest of the city since 2001 there has been only marginal gap reduction overall. The Council and partners measure gap reduction through a vitality index made up of a number of themes, data is available over the period 2001 to 2007. During this time the overall vitality measures for both the city and this particular area have improved at a similar rate. Crime has reduced both locally and across the city but local trends have fluctuated. Consequently since 2001 despite previous regeneration work the local picture is largely of improvement consistent with elsewhere in the city rather than of narrowing the gap. Some of the improvements in Scotswood Benwell also reflect the fact that problems may have moved elsewhere as a result of demolition and relocation.
- Residents of Scotswood Benwell are less satisfied with their area than the city average, but are as satisfied with the changes being made and their ability to influence decisions;
 - The employment gap between Scotswood Benwell and the city as a whole has reduced slightly from 25.4 percentage points in 2001 to 21.5 in 2007. The number of working age people claiming benefits has reduced but is still above the city average;

- The health score has improved but is not consistently narrowing the gap. Although still high teenage conception rates have fallen considerably and at a much faster rate than for the city as a whole;
- Educational attainment particularly at GCSE has improved significantly; in 2001 18.2 per cent of children achieved five or more GCSE A* to C, rising to 54.5 per cent in 2008, and the overall gap with the city average has narrowed.

23 Overall, the pace of change in Scotswood has been slow and this is becoming increasingly frustrating, particularly to residents. The Council has a poor track record of delivery and there is a legacy of failed attempts at regeneration. Physical changes have occurred as a result of the clearance programme, the opening of the Academy and land has been assembled for future initiatives. Delays to the 'Expo' are causing cynicism, however the Council remains committed to its programme and progress is being made towards the appointment of a joint venture partner. A firm agreement with partners and realistic plans for the 'Expo' are important in building confidence in the Council's ability to deliver.

Elswick

- 24** Elswick has a population of 18,000; the housing stock is 66 per cent social housing and 18 per cent private landlord. There are few shops and services in the area and poor links between neighbourhoods. The strategic approach to the regeneration of Elswick was set out in the Council's revised approach to the regeneration of the West End (December 2005). This was taken forward by the Elswick Study which covered the NDC Housing Strategy and the Inner West Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment. The Elswick Study, produced in 2005, provides the framework for regeneration in the Elswick Area over the next fifteen years. The study, funded by NDC, sought to generate a community led vision for the area's future that was aligned with the objectives of NDC, the Council, Bridging Newcastle Gateshead and Your Homes Newcastle. The housing focus for the Elswick area is to offer housing choice in an area dominated by flats. The original NDC 10 year Delivery Plan was based on priorities determined by extensive consultation with the community within a national framework which determined project objectives, later refined into measurable indicators and targets informed by the biannual MORI Household survey and fed back into the programme.
- 25** The components of a sustainable neighbourhood are being put in place in Elswick. Newcastle NDC, set up in 2000 with £54.9 million for a ten-year regeneration programme, has delivered over 150 projects. These have tackled issues around jobs and business, health, homes and environment, crime and community safety, education and lifelong learning and community development. An early focus was placed on funding to tackle social issues, particularly in relation to crime, anti-social behaviour and liveability. Major achievements to date include improving over 2,000 homes, helping over 1,200 local people into jobs and cutting crime by 38 per cent since 2000. Major investment programmes now being delivered to improve the quality of life of residents include: the Inner West Housing Renewal Area; Stanhope Street environmental improvements; and Cruddas Park regeneration.

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26 There are good levels of improvement in the Elswick area with progress being made on narrowing the gap with the city average. Of the nine Elswick neighbourhoods, five have improved at a significantly faster rate than the city average. Newcastle outperforms national averages in 12 of the 15 instances where it is possible to assess NDC level change against national benchmarks. Elswick narrowed the gap with the rest of the city on all five key indicators: crime, health, education, housing and worklessness, the only one of the 39 NDC partnerships nationally to have achieved this for all five.

- Residents' in Elswick feel more engaged in regeneration and influencing decisions affecting the local area, than city and national averages. Satisfaction with Elswick as a place to live has continued to improve from 63 per cent in 2002 to 79 per cent in 2008;
- The employment gap between Elswick and the city average has reduced considerably since 2001 - from 44 percentage points in 2001 to 26 percentage points in 2007. People claiming Incapacity Benefits and Lone Parent claimants are also reducing but remain much higher than the Newcastle rate;
- The health gap - measuring under 75 year old mortality rates on cancer, coronary heart disease and other circulatory diseases - shows Elswick narrowing the gap with the city. Teenage conception rates in Newcastle remain above the England average, and Elswick rates are much higher than the Newcastle average but there has been some good progress over the last three years. Childhood obesity is higher in the Elswick area compared to Newcastle averages;
- There have been improvements in education attainment in Elswick, and the gap with the city average has narrowed over the last two years. Significant progress has been made at GCSE level in Elswick: in 2001 18.4 per cent of children achieved five or more GCSE A* to C, rising to 58.6 per cent in 2008.

27 Improving existing housing forms a significant part of the interventions planned for the area. A Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment was completed for the Arthurs Hill, Wingrove Terraces and Elswick Triangle area. It contains long term plans for market renewal, including a nine year private sector housing improvement programme. Following declaration of a Renewal Area in spring 2006, these improvement works began in February 2007, funded by BNG and NDC. The Council have worked with private landlords in order to reduce voids through model tenant's agreements and other initiatives.

28 Environmental improvements are being delivered in Elswick. The current plans for the refurbishment of the multi storey tower blocks at Cruddas Park include the substantial improvement of the open space around the blocks in order to integrate the space better into the neighbourhood. The Management Plan for the Summerhill Square Conservation Area has been adopted by the City Council. The plan establishes policy guidance to ensure that character and appearance of the Conservation Area will be effectively managed and that opportunities to enhance the character and appearance are maximised.

- 29** Increased resources have been put in place to successfully tackle crime in Elswick. Crime has reduced by 22 per cent, and MORI found that the number of people worried about burglary has dropped from 52 per cent to 41 per cent since 2002 and is now less than the national average. There has been a 10 per cent reduction in the overall fear of crime. The New Deal Police Team, Neighbourhood Wardens and other projects are supplemented by focused work on Respect and ASB through Safe Newcastle and the operational, multi-agency Safe Neighbourhoods Action and Problem Solving group (SNAPS). This identifies hotspots of anti-social behaviour and enables targeted action to be taken. Elswick has been designated one of the pilot areas for Newcastle SNAPS.
- 30** There has been good progress in supporting Elswick residents into employment. Projects to help residents into jobs and training such as 'Workfinder' and 'At Work' have found over 500 jobs for local residents. The Ucan2 project is going well: events have included: a successful business event aimed at ethnic groups; a construction event outlined self-employment business opportunities; Shop for Jobs is based in the sports centre; a project is helping schools set up their own money making enterprise sections; and centres are running Inland Revenue courses. This is now supported by the improved educational offer of the Excelsior Academy in Scotswood which is more business focused, and aiming to increase employment prospects for young people.
- 31** Elswick residents and businesses are well informed of regeneration activity. The NDC communications team raise awareness of NDC community leadership and its projects and impact on improving the area. There are a number of newsletters with details of proposed improvements and contact details for comments. The 'Your Way' is a particularly good newsletter giving information on the warden service and how it can provide assistance. There are however gaps in the significant NDC engagement in Elswick. There is engagement with key partners, but the NDC National Evaluation Report in 2007 identified limited engagement with LSC, Small Business service, RSLs, Leisure and Youth Services and no engagement with Social Services, Connexions or the Transport Authority. This limits the opportunity to maximise improvement through using the expertise of all organisations.

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