

Regeneration

Thanet District Council

November 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 website 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 The Council's work to regenerate the district is good. The Council has an excellent understanding of local issues and challenges, and because of this, regeneration is central to everything the Council does. The Council has transformed the way it delivers some services, for example, planning, to positively support regeneration in the district. The Council attempts to balance economic, physical and social regeneration although, to date, its strengths have been in economic and physical regeneration. The Council is active in social regeneration but recognises that it needs to focus more on community development and work more closely with partners such as the primary care trust to deliver an integrated approach to regeneration. It is good at consultation with local people and service users, including black and ethnic minority groups, but it has more to do to involve the public in developing its long term vision for the regeneration of Thanet.
- 2 The Council has delivered some significant regeneration outcomes. These include physical improvements to Ramsgate and the new shopping and leisure centre, Westwood Cross. In Margate old town, the Turner Contemporary art gallery project has been a major driver for regeneration over the last ten years. The Council has been very successful at using a variety of mechanisms to bring empty properties back into use. In terms of social regeneration, the Council has focused on areas of high deprivation such as Margate Central, Cliftonville West and Newington. Work has included reducing antisocial behaviour, community capacity building and work with the voluntary sector to support vulnerable individuals. Economic activity includes Council intervention to ensure the continued operation of Ramsgate port and work with the County Council to successfully deliver two new business parks at Manston and EuroKent. The Council is working to improve education and skills, for example, through the development of Thanet Reach as a campus for further and higher education.
- 3 The Council is managing and improving value for money in the way it delivers its regeneration activities. It works very well with partners and, for example, has delivered a number of innovative projects in partnership with the County Council. In the last 18 months, the Council has significantly improved the way it manages its assets.
- 4 The Council has promising prospects for improvement. It has a strong track record in delivering physical, economic and social regeneration outcomes. It has well developed plans to progress economic and physical opportunities and to build on its social regeneration activity – the area that the Council recognises as its least well coordinated. The Council learns well and uses this learning to secure continuous improvement. For example, it participates in national initiatives, it benchmarks and undertakes joint activities with other similar councils, and it reacts positively to recommendations from inspectors and consultants.

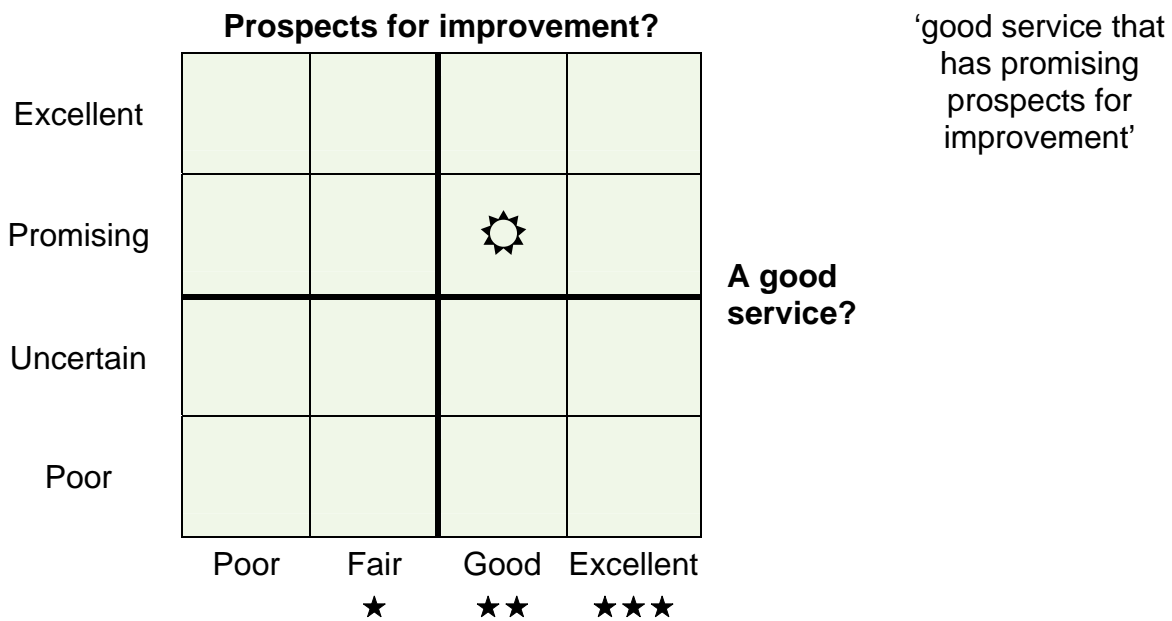
Summary

- 5 Leadership for regeneration is strong, both at senior councillor and at senior officer level. Its leadership is well respected by those partners it has regular dealings with. Councillors and officers are working well with colleagues across Kent and in the new East Kent Partnership to try and reach solutions to county-wide issues that manifest themselves in the district, such as the high proportion of vulnerable people who have moved into Thanet from across the county and beyond. The Council's leaders, managers and regeneration staff are experienced, knowledgeable and skilled, and partners praise them for their infectious enthusiasm, commitment and energy, and for the ease and openness of their joint working relationships.
- 6 The Council is acutely aware that it is a small district council, with limited resources but with a big regeneration agenda. To compensate for its own limited capacity, the Council invests heavily in supporting and promoting partnership working. To ensure it makes the most of these partnerships, the Council has agreed a comprehensive partnership framework that includes annual reviews of the impact and role of the council in its major partnerships. The Council is good at accessing the skills and experience necessary to secure further improvements by working in partnership with a range of public and voluntary sector partners. There are excellent working relationships with private sector partners too. The Council has a strong track record of leveraging in external grant funding for regeneration, and it has secured new funding streams to take this work forward. It has also been very successful in facilitating private sector inward investment and there is significant momentum locally to secure some progress in the short term despite the current economic difficulties.

Scoring the service

7 We have assessed Thanet District Council as providing a ‘good’ two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

8 The service is a good, two star service because:

- regeneration activities are based on a sound understanding of community needs and aspirations;
- the Council is prepared to intervene and take tough decisions to ensure services achieve positive outcomes for local people;
- all directorates contribute to achieving the Council's vision for regeneration through delivering a programme of activities that address social, economic and physical regeneration needs;
- a much improved planning service is helping to secure major economic developments, with significant job opportunities;

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.

Scoring the service

- the Turner Contemporary project, of regional and national importance, is contributing to significant improvements to the physical environment of Margate, encouraging business start-ups and new jobs, and attracting thousands of participants in its arts programmes;
 - education and skills development is being encouraged through the development of a higher and further education campus, the Kent Innovation Centre, the Marlowe Academy and the schools building programme - all of which have been strongly supported by the Council, either through lobbying or use of their planning powers; and the Council has established effective links between new employers and training providers;
 - strong lobbying and partnership working by the Council has led to the implementation of major transport infrastructure improvements, with further developments agreed, such as the high speed rail link, new roads and the development of Kent International airport;
 - effective engagement with local communities to promote awareness and achieve improvements to the architectural heritage of the district and to achieve environmental improvements such as community gardens and play areas, making Thanet a more attractive place to live and to visit;
 - a range of Council-led and inter-agency approaches to support community development, particularly in the most deprived wards, and to support a range of diverse and ethnic minority groups;
 - good supply of good quality homes owned by the Council and housing associations, and progress being made in addressing private sector housing issues;
 - very effective multi-agency partnership working, particularly through the Margate Renewal Partnership and the Thanet Works Programme; and
 - strong investment to deliver regeneration is being achieved by: drawing in resources through a wide range of partnerships, cross-service working within the Council, freeing up resources through the asset disposal programme, re-cycling money by ensuring developers repay initial outlays of public funds on utilities installation, and developing services in cooperation with neighbouring councils.
- 9 However, the service has more to do to:
- involve the public in the development of its regeneration vision for the district;
 - keep the public informed of its plans for Margate town centre;
 - sharpen up performance targets to ensure they are outcome-focused; and
 - find ways of effectively evaluating the value for money of its full range of regeneration activities.

10 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- it has a very successful track record of attracting inward investment and creating jobs;
- it has been delivering successful economic, physical and social regeneration activities for many years;
- it has lobbied successfully for the infrastructure improvements needed to reduce geographical isolation;
- performance indicators show steady improvement across council services over recent years;
- the planning service has improved substantially, including improving the speed of dealing with planning applications to be among the best in the country and being proactive in bringing forward key sites and employment opportunities;
- the Council provides strong leadership and supports open, trusting and positive working relationships with partners;
- senior councillors and staff are very committed to the regeneration agenda, and they have the required levels of enthusiasm, knowledge and skills to take that agenda forward;
- the vision and aims for regeneration that flow from the community strategy into the corporate plan and other strategies and business plans, are well understood and shared by councillors and staff, and are based on a sound understanding of local needs;
- the Council has been undertaking further visioning work to produce a powerful and imaginative four-page statement on what it wants Thanet to look like in 2030;
- plans are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure they stay fit for purpose, taking into account changes in circumstances such as the current economic downturn;
- the organisation has been restructured to give a stronger and more coordinated focus to community development, through the creation of a community services directorate that will take the social regeneration agenda forward into the future;
- performance management is used effectively to achieve positive outcomes, such as the top quartile performance in the numbers of empty homes brought back into use, increased participation in sports programmes and activities for young people, and increased job opportunities;
- access to performance information at the neighbourhood level is good and improving, enabling the Council with its partners to assess the impact of its regeneration work;
- learning is used very effectively to improve performance;
- sound project and risk management processes are in place;
- asset management has been strengthened and a disposal programme is releasing resources to support regeneration projects;

Scoring the service

- it has a strong track record of leveraging in external grant funding, with new funding streams secured to take regeneration work forward in the district; and
- the Council is well aware that it has limited resources of its own and is therefore highly committed to partnership working to enhance capacity; its partnership framework, together with a new partnership database, will help ensure it gets a good return on its investment in partnership working.

Recommendations

- 11 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 costs¹ 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** Improve stakeholder understanding of the Council's overall regeneration vision, strategy and plans by:
- involving the general public in developing its vision for the regeneration of Thanet; and
 - engaging regularly with local people as regeneration plans for Margate town centre change and develop.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a positive impact on the out-of-date negative image that Thanet has carried in the past; and
- increased civic pride and support for the Council's efforts to regenerate Margate.

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

Recommendation

- R2** Develop additional ways of evaluating and benchmarking value for money by working with partners to:
- ensure targets are outcome-focused; and
 - compare the costs of different regeneration activities.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a better understanding of the impact of regeneration work in Thanet; and
- improved information to demonstrate value for money to stakeholders, including local tax-payers.

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

¹ 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.

Report

Context

The locality

- 12 Thanet District covers an area of 103 square kilometres on the north-eastern corner of Kent. It has 26 miles of high quality coastline that includes 10 Blue Flag Award beaches, three Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the National Nature Reserve at Pegwell Bay. In the past, the area has suffered from geographical isolation but major road improvements over recent years, such as the dualling of the Thanet Way (A299) from the M2 to Manston and the new link road to Ramsgate Port have significantly improved access. Further transport developments are planned, such as, new roads, the development of Manston Airport and the extension of the fast rail link to Ramsgate.
- 13 The population of Thanet is 129,200 according to Office for National Statistics (ONS) June 2007 estimates. The majority of residents (95 per cent) live in the three seaside resorts of Broadstairs, Margate and Ramsgate. The remaining 5 per cent live in villages and small hamlets. The largest ethnic group in Thanet is 'white British' at 91.7 per cent, which is above the regional (89.9 per cent) and national (84.2 per cent) averages. The proportion of people from black and minority ethnic communities is low at 5.1 per cent, compared with 7.4 per cent for the south east and 11.3 per cent nationally.
- 14 Overall deprivation in Thanet is relatively high. The latest (2007) indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) figures rank the area as 65th out of 354 (where 1 is the most deprived). The district has 12 super output areas (SOA)¹ within the 10 per cent most deprived wards nationally. The most deprived wards in Thanet are Cliftonville West, Margate Central and Newington. There are no SOAs within the 10 per cent least deprived wards nationally. However, when deprivation is broken down by type (or 'domain'), the picture across the district is more variable. For employment, there are 16 SOAs and for education, skills and training, there are eight SOAs, within the 10 per cent most deprived nationally. The crime and disorder domain shows six in the 10 per cent most deprived nationally, but seven in the 10 per cent least deprived nationally. For the living environment domain, there are six in the 10 per cent most deprived, but two in the 10 per cent least deprived nationally.

¹ A Super Output Area (SOA) is a unit of geography used in the UK for statistical analysis. SOAs were created by Neighbourhood Statistics with the intention that they would not be subject to frequent boundary change, thereby making it easier to monitor statistical changes over time.

- 15 The elements of deprivation in Margate Central and Cliftonville West combine in such a way that these wards continue to be a particular focus for regeneration through a multi-agency approach. The significant issues affecting these wards include: the loss of 1,000 jobs in these two wards between 2003 and 2006 owing to the decline in tourism; an unbalanced housing market with high and increasing numbers of private rented properties, and benefit-dependent households; in-migration of economic migrants and the placement of looked after children and other vulnerable groups; entrenched and inter-linked cycles of deprivation, ill health and incapacity, and worklessness; a lack of social cohesion within and between older and newer communities, and high levels of crime compared to the rest of Thanet.
- 16 Employment, when broken down by industry, is generally in line with the regional and national distribution with most jobs (83.8 per cent) being within the service industry. Tourism-related jobs (9.7 per cent) are above the regional (7.9 per cent) and national (8.3 per cent) averages. The opening of the new retail development at Westwood Cross in 2006 created 1,500 new jobs; however, the recent closure of four Woolworth's stores in the district has had a negative impact on town centre high streets. Figures provided by NOMIS (the government's labour market statistics website) for the period July 2007 to June 2008 show Thanet's unemployment level (6.8 per cent) to be above the regional (4.2 per cent) and national (5.2 per cent) averages. Numbers of economically inactive people, at 21 per cent, were above the regional average (17.9 per cent) but similar to the national (21.2 per cent) average. Although higher than the regional and national figures, unemployment in Thanet has shown a similar trend in terms of falling unemployment levels over the last 15 years. However, the gap between Thanet and the regional average has reduced significantly, for example, from a gap of 5.1 per cent in June 1995 to a gap of 2.4 per cent in December 2008 [NOMIS].
- 17 Thanet has a particularly rich historical and cultural heritage. It has a high concentration of listed buildings, with approximately 2,500 listed buildings within the district. In Ramsgate, it has the county's largest conservation area. It has the only designated 'royal' harbour in the UK and its domestic architecture includes Georgian crescents, Victorian terraces, art deco villas and flint cottages. The area also has links with internationally important artists such as Turner, Van Gogh and Emin, and with the authors Dickens and T S Eliot.
- 18 Thanet offers education and training opportunities up to further and higher education levels. It has 11 secondary schools, including the Marlowe Academy which opened in 2005 and moved to new purpose-built premises in 2006. Canterbury Christ Church University opened a campus in Broadstairs in 2000 and is now catering for nearly 1,000 full time equivalent students. Thanet College of Further Education offers a wide range of post 16 courses, and will be moving from its current location to a new site adjoining the university at Thanet Reach.
- 19 Health inequalities are a significant issue in Thanet. Male and female life expectancy is shorter than the national average, and men from the most deprived areas have almost ten years shorter life expectancy than those from the least deprived areas. It is estimated that nearly 30 per cent of adults smoke and death rates from smoking are worse than the England average. The Kent Local Area Agreement (LAA) has prioritised tackling all age, all cause, mortality.

Report

The Council

- 20 The Council has 56 members, made up of 34 Conservative, 19 Labour and 3 Independent. The executive is composed of six councillors, each of whom holds a specific portfolio. The Council was led by Labour for many years, with a change of administration to Conservative-led in 2003.
- 21 The officer structure has recently been revised. The senior management team now consists of the chief executive, deputy chief executive and directors of finance and corporate services, environment services, community services, regeneration services, customer services and business transformation, and head of legal and democratic services.

The Council's regeneration service

- 22 The Council has had an active regeneration programme since the 1990s. The district was given Development Area Status in 1993, and from 1994 onwards the Council was successful in levering in substantial funding through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). These schemes enabled the Council to support a wide range of regeneration projects across the district, particularly in the more deprived wards and physically run down neighbourhoods. Because of the link to funding streams, regeneration was largely project and locality based, without a strong strategic focus at district level.
- 23 Regeneration is now a major cross-cutting focus for the Council, as exemplified in its corporate plan 2007-11. All directorates have priorities and targets relating to regeneration activities. However, most of the economic and physical regeneration work is undertaken by staff in the directorate for regeneration services, and the new community services directorate has a particular focus on community development and social regeneration.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 24** Elements of the Council's vision for regeneration are currently set out in a number of documents, such as, the community strategy, corporate plan, and the Economic Growth and Regeneration Strategy. Taken together, the vision encompasses:
- tackling Thanet's geographical isolation by improvements to road, rail, air and sea communication links;
 - developing central Thanet at the airport, Manston and EuroKent business parks to provide jobs opportunities for the whole of Thanet including low skilled jobs targeted at people in key areas of deprivation with high levels of worklessness;
 - developing education and training for local people to improve aspirations and provide skills needed for employment in current and target business sectors;
 - protecting Thanet's heritage by restoring the architectural heritage and maintaining the beaches;
 - creating a cafe culture in Ramsgate and diversifying the port to provide a maintenance and operations base for offshore wind farms;
 - developing and promoting Margate as a centre for creative tourism focused at the Turner Contemporary Gallery and Old Town; and
 - addressing deprivation in the six most deprived wards through social regeneration activities with a particular focus on the complex issues and severe deprivation in Central Margate and Cliftonville West.
- 25** In 2004, following two years of development work, the Council and its partners published their first community strategy. In this document the local strategic partnership (LSP) established a new strategic approach for the area, with a strong focus on the economy and regeneration. The LSP's vision of Thanet as: 'a prosperous, secure and welcoming community; a safe, attractive place to live and work; realising Thanet's potential' is supported by six key themes.
- The economy
 - Lifelong learning
 - A safer community
 - The environment and housing
 - An inclusive community
 - Health and lifestyle.

How good is the service?

- 26 The community strategy has been the key high level plan driving the regeneration agenda for the Council and its partners over the period 2004 to 2009. Actions and targets in the strategy address the particular issues important to Thanet, such as economic development, health inequalities, deprivation and the need to raise educational aspirations and achievement. Economic development, in particular, has been the driver for regeneration in Thanet. Improvement in the economy and an increase in the number of local jobs are seen as very important for increasing prosperity and well-being in the district. The strategy's economy theme sets out ambitious and long term goals in relation to employment, investment and infrastructure, business support, strategic and local transport, and culture and tourism. Other themes contribute to regeneration through, for example, raising basic skills and increasing access to post-16 education and training, reducing vandalism and fear of crime, reducing fuel poverty, making open public spaces safe, attractive and diverse, improving the quality of housing, and enabling everyone to be part of the local community and able to influence how it operates and develops.
- 27 The community strategy, with its focus on regeneration, is supported by Thanet-specific plans such as the recently revised local plan, the council's corporate plan, the community safety (crime reduction) strategy, the housing investment plan and the cultural strategy. For example, the cultural strategy is cross-cutting in nature and includes actions for planning policy and development control, as well as focusing on regeneration through tourism, special events and the development of a café culture in Margate and Ramsgate. The recently updated local plan, together with the master plan, provides an up-to-date planning framework that is being rolled forward into the local development framework (LDF).
- 28 The Council's contribution to the achievement of the community strategy is followed through into its own corporate plan, supporting strategies and detailed business plans. Where the Council is not directly responsible for a service, it uses influencing and lobbying skills to ensure regeneration ambitions are realised. It actively looks out for, and pursues opportunities to support its economic development aims. It works, for example, with education providers, to lobby for improved education and training facilities and uses its planning powers to support new buildings and campus developments. Similarly, it facilitates inward investment by new employers and developers in order to support business growth and new job opportunities, and puts employers in touch with training providers to address skills issues. The Council actively contributes to community strategy themes through partnership working, as well as through delivery of its own services. For example, the community safety partnership addresses many of the actions under the 'safer community' theme.

- 29** The Council's corporate plan for the period 2007-2011 recognises the need for an integrated approach to regeneration. The plan builds on the targets within the community strategy and sets out the Council's objectives under five service themes and one internally facing 'modern council' theme. The five service-orientated themes are: Thanet's economy, safe neighbourhoods, beautiful Thanet, quality housing and healthy communities. For each theme, the plan explains what it means, why it is a priority and what the Council will do for the next five years. These intentions are followed through into individual business and service plans. The Economic Growth and Regeneration Strategy, agreed in 2007, particularly underpins the economic aspirations of the corporate plan and provides a strong focus on the driver to increase the number of local jobs.
- 30** The Council regularly reviews its priorities and supporting plans. At the beginning of 2009, it reviewed its corporate plan to take account of the economic downturn, the tight financial context and the changes it has made to the organisational structure. This review has resulted in slimming down the plan and focusing on achievable targets that contribute equally to economic, physical and social regeneration.
- 31** The Thanet community strategy has set an effective strategic framework for the regeneration agenda over recent years. But strategic partnership working is now taking another step forward through the creation of the new, larger East Kent Partnership involving Thanet, Canterbury, Dover and Shepway Councils. Thanet Council has been proactive in supporting this development as it sees this combined approach as a way of strengthening the voice of East Kent in regional and national discussions, and a way of sharing resources to tackle long term issues. The East Kent LSP is now established, with an independent chair, and at the beginning of 2009, it issued its sustainable community strategy for consultation. The vision for East Kent is that 'by 2030, East Kent will have been transformed, building on its unique location and heritage, making it a beacon of innovation, enterprise and education excellence in the south east.'
- 32** Both the current Thanet community strategy and the draft East Kent document are consistent with regional strategies and plans, such as, the South East regional economic strategy, the regional spatial strategy and the regional transport strategy. For example, the South East Plan contains policies that support the Council's regeneration plans - such as the development of the airport. The South East Plan sees Thanet as a gateway, with the coastal towns having strategic importance as the economy of each is diversified and enlarged. It states that the district has sufficient employment land, with the new Westwood Centre, the potential growth in aviation and the proximity of major employment across the district boundary in Sandwich. In this way, the Council's priority to support economic growth and an increase in jobs is consistent with, and supported by, the plans of other planning bodies.

How good is the service?

- 33** As set out in the context section of this report, Thanet faces significant challenges. The Council recognises that a multi-agency approach is essential to tackle these deep-seated problems - particularly in the most deprived wards. The Council is therefore active in a range of successful partnerships. These include the Community Safety Partnership and the Margate Renewal Partnership. The Council is also a key partner for the delivery of Kent County Council's vision for the future, including its regeneration strategy and plans; this is particularly so as all 25 wards in Thanet are designated as EU assisted areas from 2007-2013, while in the rest of the county only three other wards are classed as assisted areas.

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

- 34** The Council's regeneration activities are based on a sound understanding of community needs and aspirations. It consults the community well on its major plans for the area, such as the community strategy for Thanet, the Council's corporate strategy, the local plan and development briefs for major sites. Corporate guidance to consultation, including evaluation, is in place to ensure a consistent and structured approach across services. To facilitate regular two-way dialogue, the Council is engaged in a range of different groups such as residents' panel, youth panel and a disability groups' forum. The Council has developed a section of its website – the knowledge hub – to draw together a wide range of up to date and detailed information about the district. Key officers have a detailed understanding of local needs down to a neighbourhood and street level. For example, a middle manager is appointed to attend each of the district's 18 Partners and Community Together (PACT) forums to liaise with the community on a range of quality of life issues. This detailed local knowledge has allowed the Council to effectively focus its regeneration activities to address issues specific to the six most deprived wards in Thanet.
- 35** The Council is prepared to intervene and make difficult decisions to enable changes that improve the local economy and meet local needs. For example, the Council stepped in to purchase Ramsgate Port when the owners went in to receivership – to save the ferry service and freight activities. It also took a difficult decision to allow the development of Westwood Cross as a retail centre because it believed, and the research showed, that the benefits would significantly outweigh the negative effects to existing high streets in Thanet. It recently approved the China Gateway development at Manston Business Park, despite some local opposition, because it fits with the strategic plan for the development of the airport and the economy of Thanet. As a result, the Council's decisive actions are resulting in positive outcomes for local people.

- 36** The Council has a clear vision and programme of activities to address the regeneration needs of the District. Key councillors, officers and close partners can all articulate what the Council is trying to achieve and the associated programme of regeneration activities. All directorates in the Council contribute to the regeneration programme as do key partnerships such as the Margate Renewal Partnership. However, because the overall regeneration vision and actions are mainstreamed through a range of documents, services and partnerships it means that it is difficult for the public to understand the Council's broad regeneration vision and its co-ordinated activities that work towards it. It is important that the Council effectively engages key stakeholders and the public in developing its overall regeneration vision so that it can take forward all relevant partnering opportunities and maintain public support for important regeneration initiatives such as the Turner Contemporary Gallery and China Gateway.
- 37** The Council's effectiveness in communicating its strategy and detailed regeneration activities is mixed. Close partners understand the Council's regeneration strategy and activities very well. But the council still has more to do to overcome the former negative image that the district has attracted. The public is concerned at the length of time being taken to redevelop key sites in Margate, such as the Dreamland and Rendezvous sites and also the decline of Margate High Street. Council officers are working hard to address these issues but progress is difficult as development depends on the private owners and market conditions. The Council has not effectively communicated the work that it is doing in Margate and it has not yet consulted the public on the key issue of the future of Margate High Street. However, it has met regularly with local traders and it plans to consult with the public as part of the LDF consultation process.
- 38** The Council has significantly improved its approach to integrated social, economic and physical regeneration in recent years by building powerful multi-agency partnerships to tackle the district's most difficult regeneration issues. Successful partnership working is central to the Council's delivery of regeneration, and a new generation of partnerships are in place to take the work forward. The Council has drawn together strong experienced leaders and board teams to tackle these issues through the Margate Renewal Partnership (MRP) and the Thanet Works programme. The MRP is co-ordinating social, economic and physical interventions in Central Margate and Cliftonville West. The partnership, chaired by the Chief Executive of the South East England Development Agency, started in 2006. The Turner Contemporary has been at the heart of the Margate regeneration programme since 1999, and the MRP is helping to take this and other projects forward. Turner Contemporary was a key stimulus for several major funding bids which have resulted in a range of successful regeneration outcomes for the town. Over 70 buildings in the Old Town have been refurbished and historic buildings given new uses, a cultural quarter has been created with new creative industries and other businesses encouraged to locate in the town, and physical improvements have been completed in areas near the sea front. Work is continuing on the final phases of improvements to the public realm of Margate Old Town and construction work has begun on the Turner Gallery itself. Through its programme of exhibitions and events, the Turner Contemporary has already attracted over 500,000 visitors. Currently, the gallery is using the former Marks and Spencer store as a temporary exhibition space and outreach work is engaging people from communities in Thanet including the areas of severe deprivation.

How good is the service?

In this way, the concept of the Turner Contemporary has contributed positively to physical, economic and social regeneration in Thanet.

Economic regeneration

- 39 The Council has a clear strategy to develop the economy of Thanet. It has an up to date Local Plan and a masterplan of strategic regeneration sites that it consults the public on. The plans include:
- the development of Kent International Airport and the adjacent Manston business park as a key future driver of the local economy;
 - diversification of Ramsgate Port;
 - development of Eurokent Business Park to bring new companies in to Thanet;
 - development of Thanet Reach as a learning campus; and
 - major changes to the centre of Margate with the redevelopment of key sites, modification to the central shopping area, and the new Turner Contemporary Gallery linked to creative tourism developments at the harbour arm and old town.
- 40 The Council's planning service is much improved and is proactive in bringing forward key sites and employment opportunities. In 2007, the Council reorganised the planning function, creating a major development team to facilitate key projects with the greatest impact on economic activity. Recent success includes Thanet Earth – a large salad production business that has already created new permanent jobs, is currently recruiting for the first harvest in spring 2009 and will eventually employ 550 staff at completion of the development. Another example is China Gateway (phase 1) a major warehousing and marketing and sales operation at Manston that plans to employ 1,200 people. The Council has deliberately targeted the provision of large numbers of low skilled jobs and is working with partners and employers to match these jobs to people living in the wards with high levels of deprivation, and worklessness.
- 41 The Council is addressing the low level of skills in Thanet by developing a learning campus at Thanet Reach. The Council owns and operates the Kent Innovation Centre, a purpose built facility funded by government and European grants. The centre provides support to new businesses to help them grow and move on to new premises. Its 45 offices provide employment for 109 people. The Council also played a key role in attracting Canterbury Christ Church University to the site and there are advanced plans to locate Thanet College at the site to complete the learning campus. It is working closely with these academic bodies to try and match new courses to the targeted business sectors. The Thanet Reach campus is significant in raising aspirations and skills in the District with the Council actively working with the educational establishments to match future courses to targeted business sectors. For example, Thanet College specialises in catering and hospitality - meeting current and projected local tourism industry needs. And the Council is exploring options for introducing higher education engineering courses at the campus to develop skills locally to support the projected expansion of wind farm and aviation related jobs. This is helping to raise aspirations and improve opportunities for local people.

- 42 The Council is effectively working in partnership to develop Ramsgate Port as a service base for offshore wind farms. It aims to make the port the principle operations and maintenance base for the south east of the country. The Council, as owner and operator of the Port of Ramsgate, has brought together a project group of agencies and potential users. Agreements have already been signed with one operator, with negotiations ongoing for further contracts. In this way, the Council is helping to broaden the economic base of the district, and also attract some higher skilled work that might help retain local graduates.

Physical regeneration

- 43 The Council has taken a successful long term strategic approach of influencing partners to improve Thanet's transport infrastructure. The Council has engaged in a range of initiatives to make the area more accessible as a place to visit and to get around. For example, it has recently successfully lobbied and obtained agreement for:
- further road improvements to link past improvements to the Thanet Way, Kent International Airport and EuroKent business Park and Westwood Cross – and to the proposed East Kent Access Road; and
 - the fast rail link to London that will begin in December 2009.

The Council has maintained ferry links from Ramsgate to Belgium and is negotiating with an operator to introduce a fast ferry service to France. It is also working closely with Kent County Council and rail operators to ensure that, when Kent International Airport expands, a new parkway rail station will be built, linked to the East Kent Access Road.

- 44 The Council works very well with partners to bring forward business opportunities. For example, the Council, with partners, created the East Kent Spatial Development Company (EKSDC) to deliver infrastructure - particularly electricity supply - to Manston and EuroKent business parks. As the developments progress, developers contribute to the initial costs of the utilities installation (originally paid for out of public funds), and EKSDC is able to recycle the money for further regeneration activity. Recognising that more was required to attract companies to the business parks, the Council set up an arms-length company, East Kent Opportunities with Kent County Council. It used European grant funding to forward fund a £4 million road into EuroKent and one third of the site is now let.
- 45 Council officers engage effectively with local communities to promote awareness and commitment to preserving Thanet's rich architectural heritage. Officers are engaged in civic and conservation societies, and residents associations, as well as in one to one discussions with property owners. A current priority is Cliftonville West and working with the residents' association to make this a conservation area. The Council has been successful in bidding for Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) funding, through the Heritage Lottery Fund, receiving an early allocation of £1.2 million for improvements in Ramsgate. More recently, a THI grant of £1.5 million was made for work in Margate Old Town, which started in 2008. Not only is this work helping to make these areas more attractive for local residents but it is an important aspect of boosting Thanet as a tourist destination.

How good is the service?

- 46 The Council has made excellent progress in returning empty properties to use in Thanet. Council services such as planning, environmental health and building control combine well together in targeting owners of the most visible properties, for example, by preparing schedules of work to get the houses back in to good condition and use. The Council brought 243 properties back in to use in the last three years putting it among the best performing councils in the country. The Council has focused on increasing the levels of owner occupation and reducing levels of private rented accommodation with the aim of providing a more balanced socio-economic mix for the area. It has also provided grants to registered social landlords to purchase 11 homes of multiple occupation (HMOs), or properties at risk of becoming HMOs - to provide high quality affordable or shared ownership homes. This all helps to improve the appearance of targeted areas and make them more attractive places to live.

Social regeneration

- 47 In areas with high levels of deprivation, the Council carries out a range of social regeneration initiatives that are focused on the needs of individual communities - particularly in the six most deprived wards. For example, the Council worked closely with residents in Newington to identify and solve local issues. Outcomes include:
- renovating the local community centre and passing it to community ownership;
 - effectively addressing anti-social behaviour; and
 - current work to replace problem properties in the centre of Newington with houses.

The Council, with partners, is also delivering an innovative education programme in Newington and Whitehall. The initiative, called Doorstep Challenge, provides a range of courses in local venues. For example: food hygiene, cooking on a budget, money management and a course leading to a certificate in community sports leadership. Such initiatives help to increase skills and raise educational and employment aspirations.

- 48 The Council identifies successful and innovative initiatives that support social regeneration and takes action to make them sustainable. For example:
- Community safety task and finish group operations, such as the initiative to combat night time violence in Marine Terrace, Margate, resulted in a 49 per cent reduction in violent crime during June to August 2008, compared with the same period in 2007. Monitoring of outcomes established that the task and finish groups were very effective and this has now become a mainstream activity for the Council and partners;
 - Clean Sweep, a multi-agency visit to a targeted area to address issues such as use of premises, abandoned vehicles litter and graffiti. The pilot sweep visited 69 properties and outcomes included a housing improvement enforcement order, 16 properties identified as potentially unauthorised homes of multiple occupation, 30 notices served regarding rubbish, over ten tonnes of rubbish and two abandoned vehicles removed, and ten arrests of suspected illegal immigrants. Partners reviewed the outcomes and introduced a regular programme of Clean Sweep visits across the district;

- the Sport 4 NRG programme that delivers sporting opportunities and positive activities, such as a project for young people who may have offended or are seen as at risk of offending. Outcomes included very low re-offending rates. When Sport England funding ran out, the Council allocated core funding to continue the programme; and
 - the Pipeline Youth Initiative, a local charity that works with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people providing diversionary activities and empowering young people to move on into employment, education and training. The Council continues to support this charity and activity has increased significantly as a result.
- 49** The Council works well with partners to support a range of diverse and ethnic minority groups. For example, the Council helped set up the Thanet Interfaith Council and supports the East Kent Muslim Women's Group, the East Kent Chinese Community Group, the East Kent Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender Group and is working on the setting up of a forum for the East European community in Thanet. In this way, the Council is actively recognising the changing needs and make-up of its communities and helps to ensure that appropriate support is in place.
- 50** Community engagement and support are an integral part of the regeneration of Central Margate and Cliftonville West. The Council is using Safer Stronger Communities Funding to enable a range of projects and voluntary and community sector workers. The Council has activities to engage with the long term resident community, newly settled migrant communities and the high level of transient migrant workers. Much of the work is focused on young people and the growing and often transient migrant population. For example, funding supports:
- three workers of the Kent Refugee and Minority Support Group who run a range of community events, workshops, youth club and after school club;
 - Pie Factory Music to map and improve youth activities in the wards - with particular focus on inclusiveness for young people who are disabled, or from local black, minority or ethnic communities and young people who are not in employment, education or training; and
 - a welfare officer at St Paul's Community Centre and a Migrant Helpline advice worker who attends the Centre part time and helps migrant workers to access core council services.

How good is the service?

- 51** The Council has made good initial progress in addressing extreme private sector housing issues in Central Margate and Cliftonville West. The decline in the tourist industry resulted in many large properties becoming used as low quality private sector one bed flats and homes of multiple occupation (HMOs) with associated social and environmental problems. The Council has been using its powers to license and, where appropriate, close HMOs. It has worked successfully with some owners to convert HMOs to better standard flats. It also introduced an innovative planning policy to prevent the conversion of properties into one bedroom flats - as part of a strategy to create a more balanced mix of property. It has provided over 440 grants and loans to improve the appearance and quality of the properties in the area, and grants for 20 environmental projects, such as alley-gates, removing dead and diseased trees, and repairing and replacing street lighting in 16 streets. In this way, the Council is improving the quality of the environment in these two wards, as well as addressing social issues.
- 52** The district has a good supply of quality housing association and council homes. A recent housing inspection found that the stock shows a high level of energy efficiency and all housing association and council homes in the district are forecast to meet the 2010 deadline to meet the decent homes standard.
- 53** The Council's work in social regeneration and community cohesion has not been as strong as its work in economic and physical regeneration, although it has been giving this more attention in recent years. The Council recognises that community cohesion is still an area of risk in some areas (particularly Cliftonville West) despite its work to date. Key stakeholders believe that the Council's work in social regeneration is not as strong as other aspects of regeneration. For example, they are concerned how some activities with hard-to-reach groups will be sustained once the Safer Stronger Community Fund support ends - although some aspects have already been absorbed into the Council's core funding. The Council has recognised that it needs to provide more focus to its community development and cohesion work and is re-structuring its community development team to support this.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 54** The Council effectively draws in resources through a wide range of effective partnerships to provide good value for money in its regeneration work. For example, the Council donated land worth an estimated £1 million to support the Turner Contemporary Gallery – a pivotal development in the regeneration of Margate. This will be supplemented with £17.5 million investment from partners with a projected outcome of 130,000 visits per year. This has been supported by the Margate Creative Project, paid for by European funding. Projects completed include the renovation of the town's harbour arm, improved pedestrian connections to the Old Town and grants to improve empty properties. The investment of over £2.5 million of public money has levered in over £7.5 million of private sector funding. This has transformed the old town bringing 70 buildings back in to economic use and attracted an estimated additional 50,000 visitors in 2007.

- 55** The Council is improving its effectiveness in managing partnerships. In 2008, it agreed a comprehensive partnership framework to ensure it makes the most of these arrangements. This framework and guidance is accessible to staff via the Council's intranet and it sets out the governance arrangements and standards that the Council is committed to achieving in partnership working.
- 56** The Council effectively prioritises and focuses a range of its core services to contribute towards the regeneration of the district. Services work well together to improve the economy and tackle issues in areas of higher deprivation. For example, services including: housing, environmental health, building control, planning, sports development, community safety and street cleaning all work closely together, and with partners, in addressing improvement in Margate and Cliftonville. This cross-service working has resulted in improvements to cleanliness, safety and physical appearance of the area.
- 57** Resources are effectively managed to deliver key regeneration priorities. For example, the Council recently decided to commit £90,000 to the regeneration of Margate to support partner contributions and to bring the successful Sport 4 NRG programme in to core service delivery at the end of external Sports Council grant funding. The Council has made these decisions at a time of overall budget reduction. This prioritisation of resources demonstrates the Council's commitment to regeneration in the district.
- 58** The Council is using its asset management process effectively to support regeneration. Through a structured programme of review and disposal, it is providing sites for regeneration projects - for example the seaside site for the development of prestige apartments in Ramsgate that will support the transformation of the town centre. Some buildings have been given over to community use. It is also saving money by locating all council staff into one building, from 15 different sites. These actions are contributing to greater efficiency and improved value for money through the effective management of the Council's assets.
- 59** Over the last two years the Council has strengthened its approach to achieving value for money through the planning process. For example, it has used section 106 agreements (conditions negotiated with developers through the planning process), to deliver 51 affordable houses over the last 18 months, with a further 187 anticipated on sites currently under construction. The recent China Gateway agreement requires the developer to provide training initiatives and transport provision for local people. The agreement for the development of the Sea Bathing Hospital includes a sum of nearly £1 million for use in housing or regeneration projects elsewhere in the district and the Council plans to increasingly divert such funds towards housing regeneration in Cliftonville West, designed to balance housing market in this ward. In this way the Council is proactively using opportunities to support its regeneration priorities in a cost effective way.
- 60** The Council has not sufficiently exploited all appropriate external funding opportunities. For example, the local area has not received its fair share of Big Lottery funding and the Council recognises that it has missed opportunities to make partnership use of some funding from the primary care trust (PCT).

How good is the service?

- 61 Methods to demonstrate value for money from regeneration are underdeveloped. The Council relies on formal reviews of regeneration projects that are a condition of the grant funding. These show a mixed picture of delivery of value for money although the very recent review of European Regional Development Funding found that the schemes had delivered jobs at a cost that compared favourably with other schemes. The Council has access to some comparable information, such as the Kent Price Book, that enables it to compare its service costs and delivery with other councils. However, the Council does not evaluate the value for money of its regeneration activities by routinely benchmarking costs and benefits of all activities and projects. This limits its ability to demonstrate to itself and to taxpayers that it is providing value for money.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 62** The Council has a successful track record of attracting investment and creating and safeguarding jobs through positive planning and regeneration projects. It estimates that between 1998 and 2008, 13,545 jobs have been created or safeguarded and £185 million invested in the district. Figures from Locate in Kent's East Kent Review of 2005/07 show that Thanet has a strong record of both creating job opportunities and retaining employment compared to the other Kent Councils. The gap in unemployment between Thanet and the rest of the South East has steadily reduced from 5 per cent in 1993 to less than 2 per cent in 2008. During that period unemployment in Thanet reduced from 12 per cent to 3 per cent. Although unemployment has recently risen again to 4.4 per cent, in December 2008 the new Thanet Earth development started recruiting staff via a recruitment day held at the Margate Jobcentre and attended by 317 local job seekers. Thanet Earth will employ 550 staff when the development is complete and many of the jobs are low-skilled - in line with local needs. The Council was involved from an early stage in planning this development as it recognised and supported the opportunity to create jobs suited to its local population.
- 63** The Council has a strong track record of addressing the issue of geographical isolation. It has successfully lobbied for improvements to the road and rail networks such as the dual carriageway link in to Thanet and the Manston Business Park and fast rail links due to start in 2009 making Thanet towns more accessible to London for commuters. Through its management of Ramsgate Port it has worked to maintain ferry and freight services and has effectively used the local plan and political lobbying to attract a passenger operator to develop Kent International Airport with passenger services due to start in 2009. These developments are important for making the area attractive to new businesses and London commuters.
- 64** The Council is working effectively with partners to improve education and training opportunities. It is a founding member of the local Employer Engagement Partnership that brings together recruitment and training providers and identifies which provider is best placed to work with a particular employer. The Council has enabled the use of Thanet Reach and EuroKent business parks to significantly improve education and training facilities in Thanet. Thanet Reach has been turned in to a campus area with Canterbury Christ Church University bringing higher education opportunities to Thanet for the first time. The Marlowe Academy at EuroKent is adjacent to neighbourhoods with significant deprivation. It replaced the failing Ramsgate School and academic results have very significantly improved. Adjacent to the Academy, an all weather competition standard athletics track and stadium has been built with funding from the district and county councils, Sports Lottery Fund and a charitable trust. Strong lobbying and support from the Council was instrumental in bringing all these improved educational facilities to Thanet.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 65 The Council is effectively using partnership working to improve the value for money it delivers in its regeneration work. For example, the willingness to pool resources with Kent County Council on Manston and EuroKent business parks has allowed rapid development of the infrastructure. Outcomes include relocation of expanding local businesses to Manston that may otherwise have been lost from the district. It has built on the learning from its partnership working in the past to develop new multi-agency partnerships to tackle the major regeneration challenges that the district still faces.
- 66 The Council's plans to transform Westwood Cross to a thriving retail area have been very successful with a wide selection of shopping and leisure opportunities for local people. The economic outcomes include 1,500 jobs, reducing the flow of retail spend out of the district and an important boost to confidence for investors and the public in a thriving future for Thanet.
- 67 The Council has been very successful in obtaining European and Government funds to achieve social, economic and physical outcomes contributing to achieving the regeneration vision for Thanet. Some examples of outcomes are:
- central Ramsgate adjacent to the Marina transformed in to a café culture by improvements to the public realm and properties;
 - transforming Margate Old Town and the harbour arm with improvements to the public realm and properties that now house artists studios', galleries and a restaurant resulting in increased visitors to the area;
 - Providing road and electricity services to Manston and EuroKent business parks resulting in new business and jobs at both sites;
 - the Kent Innovation Centre – a business incubator unit that provides premises and support for new businesses at Thanet Reach;
 - strengthening support services at St Paul's Community Centre, Cliftonville; this has become the hub of the community and delivers a range of services including welfare, advice and signposting contributing to community development and social cohesion in this area of severe deprivation; and
 - the provision of play areas, multi-use games area for young people, a cafe and improved lighting at Dane Park, an area of significant deprivation, after asking local people what improvements they wanted to see.
- 68 The Council has enhanced the heritage of Thanet by investing in its historic buildings and beaches. In addition to the significant investment in empty properties and grants for heritage properties at Ramsgate and Margate, the Council has successfully met its target to gain blue flag recognition for good management of ten beaches.
- 69 The Council has steadily improved its performance over recent years, although for some indicators this was from a low base. In 2007/08 the Council improved the majority of its performance indicators (66 per cent) over the previous year. Examples of the improvements in service include the following.
- Substantial improvements have been made to the planning service, including improving the speed of dealing with planning applications to be among the best in the country and forming a major developments team that works in a proactive way to deliver the Council's vision.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- The public are experiencing better levels of service through Gateway Plus - a joint project with Kent County Council that provides a customer service centre and a single point of contact for queries relating to a range of public services.
- 70** Stakeholders and partners trust the Council and have confidence in it. They believe that the Council is approachable, will listen, that staff are easy to work with and that results will be delivered. This is important as it has encouraged businesses such as Thanet Earth to invest in Thanet and very influential individuals to join the regeneration partnerships.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 71** The Council provides strong leadership for regeneration, both at senior councillor and at senior officer level. Its leadership is well respected by those partners with whom it has regular dealings, although there is still a legacy of a more negative view from a few more distant partners. Over the last few years the Council has forged strong and effective links with other agencies, ranging from the regional development agency through to the County Council, local business leaders and voluntary sector organisations. These excellent working relationships have resulted in positive outcomes for Thanet - such as, the County Council deciding to bring forward five Thanet schools into phase 1 of the County's Building Schools for the Future programme. The Council's effective lobbying and influencing skills have helped garner the influence of others to support its vision for the future. For example, the Council has been very active, and successful, over a number of years in lobbying for improved road, rail, air, sea and public transport in the district. It jointly commissioned the Thanet Inquiry – an investigation into the placement of large numbers of vulnerable people into Thanet by other councils in the UK. It has followed up the inquiry by lobbying government and other councils to address this issue and this has resulted in new guidance from the government and an agreement to develop a placement clearing house in Kent. The County Council has also agreed to put in a 'Supporting People' team to address the acute issues in Cliftonville West, and is working with the Local Government Association to stop the current practice of sending vulnerable homeless people to Thanet. In this way, key stakeholders recognise the strong leadership being given by Thanet Council and its importance to them in supporting effective partnership working.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 72** The Thanet Community Strategy has been driving improvement since it was first published in 2004. The strategy is well set out, in plain language and an accessible format. It explains the consultation process and how the key themes and action plans were developed. The economy is the top priority and includes employment, investment and infrastructure, business support, strategic transport, local transport, culture and tourism. The Council, with its partners, can demonstrate the achievement of improvements in all these areas - such as the creation of 1,500 new jobs at the Westwood Cross retail and leisure complex in 2006, the opening of new roads and bus routes, and major tourism events attracting 150,000 visitors each year. These priorities are being taken forward by the new East Kent LSP which the Council has been proactive in establishing. The draft sustainable community strategy is based on statistical analysis and a wide stakeholder event, and is currently out for consultation. The new strategy is informing work being undertaken by the Council to review its corporate plan.
- 73** The Council has a good understanding of what it is aiming to achieve through regeneration. These aims are recognised and shared by local partners and stakeholders, including councillors and staff. The Council's strategic planning documents demonstrate a joined-up approach, both across high level plans and down from the community strategy, through the corporate plan to individual service and business plans. Service plans show good alignment with corporate objectives and include activities and targets linked to regeneration. The Council is very aware of the economic downturn and the possible impact on its strategies and plans. It has recently reviewed and revised its corporate plan to take account of the economic context, its tight budget position, its organisational re-structuring and the new sustainable community strategy. It has used this review to make sure resources remain focused on areas needing development, such as the newly formed community services directorate. In this way the Council is regularly reviewing its key plans to ensure they remain fit for purpose.
- 74** The Council is strengthening its vision and management of regeneration, to ensure a balanced approach to economic, physical and social regeneration. With cross-party support, it has developed a powerful and imaginative new vision statement of Thanet in 2030. This four-page statement builds on 12 months' work that brings together all the current strategic documents, including the latest version of the County Council's regeneration strategy, the extensive consultation carried out in preparing the corporate plan, and the results of the MORI residents' survey. The statement is being considered at the February cabinet meeting and will then be circulated for wider consultation with stakeholders. The Margate Renewal Partnership is progressing a broader approach to regeneration based on the recommendations in the Margate Renewal Study, which the Partnership and Council commissioned in early 2008. The Partnership's new action plan prioritises actions to develop key sites, support creative and cultural industries, deliver neighbourhood renewal and engage the communities in renewal to establish vibrant and cohesive communities. In this way the partnership aims to make a bigger impact in Central Margate and West Cliftonville, through a multi agency approach that includes a balanced programme of social, economic and physical regeneration programmes.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

While the Council has been engaged in a wide variety of community development projects as part of its major regeneration programmes, these have been less well coordinated across Thanet, compared with economic regeneration. In recognition of the need to give a stronger and more coordinated focus to community development, the Council has used its organisational restructuring to create a community services directorate, including a new team focused on improving community engagement, development and cohesion. These developments will help ensure the Council maintains a strong focus on all aspects of regeneration in future.

- 75 The Council continues to think ahead and makes bold decisions to support the future regeneration of Thanet. For example, it has planned to mitigate the likely negative impact of the current economic downturn on town centre high streets (particularly Margate), through drawing up of a master plan in consultation with local traders and business partners. The Council has made forward looking decisions relating to culture and the contribution this can make to tourism and social regeneration. It is effectively riding out local scepticism concerning the Turner Contemporary gallery which it is supporting through giving land to the project, approving planning applications and supporting arts outreach work in schools and community locations. It is linking these developments to job creation and physical regeneration through, for example, actions to create a culture quarter, with workshops and galleries in the Margate old town, and an exhibition and workshop space in the old Marks and Spencer store in the High Street. In 2008, the Council purchased the historically important Theatre Royal, with the help of the County Council and Arts Council, in order to support cultural and tourism development, as well community programmes. In this way, the Council is ensuring that its major decisions support its vision for regeneration across the district.
- 76 Sound arrangements are in place for project and risk management, which is an important aspect of delivering successful regeneration outcomes. Corporate templates are provided on the intranet and all projects, whether capital or revenue, are expected to follow the corporate process, including the monitoring of costs, funding and efficiency. The project brief template has recently been revised to make it more straightforward, and project briefs have to include cross-cutting implications such as equality and diversity. Project documentation will be included in a new Performance Plus system that has recently been purchased and is currently being prepared for full use by June. The new system means that any user (staff or councillor) will be able to download reports as needed. The Council's risk management strategy has been in place since 2004 and is reviewed annually. The risk register is on line and managers can check the status of risks they are responsible for at any time. Risks are reviewed regularly by a directors' group and by the audit and governance committee. There is a direct link from the project management system into the on line risk register, ensuring that risk assessment and management is an integral part of the project management process. In this way, the Council is ensuring that its processes remain fit for purpose and are continually improved.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 77** Performance management is achieving improvements in the outcomes of regeneration work. For example, in terms of housing regeneration the Council has achieved top quartile, and improving performance, over the last three years for the numbers of empty homes brought back into use - 68 homes in 2005/06, 85 in 2006/07 and 90 in 2007/08. Monitoring and evaluation of individual regeneration projects takes place through project boards and is documented in project evaluation reports. Community groups and residents' associations are involved in evaluating outcomes of community-based projects. Where meaningful performance indicators are hard to identify, case studies are used to demonstrate outcomes; for example, case studies have been used to evaluate the impact of youth activities run by voluntary organisations with the support of the Council. Where possible, benchmarking takes place against other councils who are undertaking similar types of regeneration projects; for example, the Council compared the impact of its EDRF funded projects with Hastings Council.
- 78** Clearly presented performance information on council priorities is provided regularly for councillors and staff. Quarterly reports are considered by the corporate management team and the cabinet, and portfolio holders meet regularly with service directors. Performance indicator information is also summarised into an annual report using a traffic light system. However, some of this information is more process than outcome focused - particularly for the project monitoring data. A number of the actions in the corporate plan are also about processes rather than outcomes, making it more difficult for the Council to measure and assess the impact of its actions. Part of the recent work to revise the corporate plan has been to look at targets and, where necessary, to make them tighter and more focused on addressing weaknesses. This will help the Council to get a better overview of the impact of its regeneration work as a whole.
- 79** Council access to performance information at the neighbourhood level is good and improving. Monthly monitoring of crime and housing data by locality already takes place. Ward-based data has been used to lever in external funding and has helped with the targeting of specific inter-agency actions such as 'Operation Clean Sweep'. Phase 1 of establishing the knowledge hub on the Council's website is complete and gives access to a range of information, including indicators of deprivation, health and employment. Phase two will provide further detail, such as, information on older people to show performance against the older people's strategy. This improved availability of data through the knowledge hub will enable the Council and its partners to develop further the basket of indicators they need to fully assess the impact of social, economic and environment regeneration work at the neighbourhood level.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 80** The Council is very effective at using learning to improve performance. It has responded positively to previous inspection reports and acted on recommendations, such as strengthening its strategic planning framework. It also uses consultants' reports effectively, such as using the Margate Renewal Report to draw up an action plan that builds on the successful outcomes to date but takes the work a step further to achieve even greater impact. It has made visits to other regions, to learn about regional airports and the implications for the development of Manston airport. It works closely with other councils who have similar issues and environments; for example, the arts development officers from Thanet and Blackpool are working together on a joint project. The Council is also keen to be involved in, and learn from, national initiatives and is currently a pilot site for the Department for Communities and Local Government's mixed communities' pilot. In this way the Council is actively seeking ways to learn from outside as well as from its own projects and activities.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 81** The Council has a strong track record of leveraging in external funding for regeneration, and it has secured new funding streams to take this work forward. Between 1994 and 2009 it has secured £185.3 million of inward investment, including grant funding and private sector investment. Grants have been secured from a range of sources, for example, £31.4 million from ERDF between 2000 and 2006, and £27.4 million from SRB between 1994 and 2006. More recently, the Safer Stronger Communities Fund has brought in £3.7 million. Successful bids have been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a range of heritage conservation projects, including £1.5 million to improve over two miles of Margate sea front. New funding streams include the allocation of over £4 million from the Working Neighbourhood Fund which is supporting the new, district-wide programme called Thanet Works. The Council's ability to attract funding and investment is having a significant impact on the prosperity of the district.
- 82** The Council has a good balance of regeneration projects that are funded by public and private sector. While new private sector investment in the business parks will reduce, because of the economic downturn, the public sector investments in initiatives such as the Turner Contemporary Gallery and Thanet Works are assured. Some stakeholders observe that Thanet could avoid the worst impacts of the economic downturn because some of its private sector initiatives, such as, Thanet Earth and the support industries for offshore wind farms are likely to continue to expand despite the downturn.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 83** The Council makes the most of its own limited resources to support regeneration. It regularly reviews its own capacity in order to maximise the support it gives to regeneration work. For example, its recent review of its corporate plan, in the light of the economic downturn, has ensured that resources stay in place for key projects such as the Sport 4 NRG programme. Towards the end of 2008, the Council started an organisational restructuring. As well as achieving necessary savings, this process is releasing funds to support new areas of focus. For example, the revenues and benefits teams are being combined, to increase efficiency and release resources, while the new community services directorate is being strengthened to give a more coordinated approach to community development across the district. The creation of the major developments team by drawing staff from different service teams has increased flexibility for supporting new larger projects. The Council uses its own procurement practices to support local business and it encourages local people to buy services locally through messages on its website and through publications. All these different measures help the Council to ensure that its resources are deployed to best effect, in support of its priorities.
- 84** The Council's leaders, senior managers and regeneration staff are experienced, knowledgeable and skilled in leading, supporting and delivering regeneration outcomes. Partners praise them for their infectious enthusiasm, commitment and energy, and for the ease and openness of their joint working relationships. The Council actively seeks opportunities to build this internal staff capacity by encouraging secondments in, for example, from the County Council, and through jointly funded posts. In this way, the Council is using effective human resource management practices to support its regeneration work.
- 85** The Council has played a proactive role in the development of the East Kent LSP and the move towards joint service provision across the four councils. It is developing ways of joint working in areas such as tourism, housing management and waste management – aimed at increasing efficiency and delivering improved value for money.
- 86** The Council is effectively facilitating new multi-agency partnerships to address the major regeneration challenges of Thanet. The Margate Renewal Partnership has recently extended its scope to cover a broader social, economic and physical agenda across a wider area including Cliftonville West and Margate High Street. The Council is also working very closely with the new Thanet Works programme in building a wide ranging multi-agency solution for the complex problems in this area. All these strong new partnerships are increasing the Council's capacity to deliver its ambitious regeneration agenda.
- 87** The Council is addressing effectively the national, regional and local priority of worklessness and dependency through the new Thanet Works programme. It is using a £4 million grant from the Working Neighbourhood Fund to set up this major project that will address worklessness and social elements of deprivation in key target areas across Thanet. It has used its close working with the County Council to secure a high level secondment to set up the programme and key partnership involvement. A leadership group is driving forward delivery and change with key partners, such as Jobcentre Plus, Learning and Skills Council, Kent County Council, East Kent PCT, Business Link Kent, further and higher education providers and the third sector.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 88 The Council is keen to find a new and innovative approach for tackling the multiple deprivation problems in Cliftonville West and is working proactively with partners to establish an inter-agency task force. The County Council has committed to supporting this task force by funding a coordinator post. The Council has good relationships with government agencies and has wasted no time in establishing contact with the new Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The HCA is already a member of the Margate Renewal Partnership and is actively considering how it can assist the Council with its priority actions - such as purchasing properties in Cliftonville West in order to reduce the number of HMOs and help improve the quality of private housing. These proactive partnership approaches are helping to ensure that regeneration outcomes are delivered both now and into the future.
- 89 The Council is acutely aware that it is a small district council, with limited resources but with a big regeneration agenda. Some partners comment that the Council's resources are stretched and that this sometimes leads to delays in decision-making. Others comment that they are continually amazed at what the Council manages to deliver and that, while staff may be stretched, they continue to respond proactively to any regeneration opportunity that matches the Council's priorities. To compensate for its own limited financial capacity, the Council invests heavily in supporting and promoting partnership working. As part of the Council's partnership framework, there will be an annual assessment, to see whether the partnership is achieving its intentions and delivering value for money. This review will take place at the end of each financial year, starting in 2009. The partnership framework, together with a new partnership database, will help ensure that the Council is getting good returns from its investments in partnership working.
- 90 The Council has achieved significant improvements to its asset management. In 2008, it agreed a new asset management strategy and appointed an asset manager. It has taken a systematic approach to documenting and valuing its assets and has drawn up a plan for disposals based on a series of questions, linked to the corporate plan. There has been significant public engagement in the consultation process and overview and scrutiny has been actively involved. Consultation documents provide clearly presented information, including maps and photographs, of the potential sites. Some council assets have been used directly to support regeneration projects such as the land given for the Turner Contemporary; however, the disposal programme is now on hold pending an improvement in the property market and economic situation. In the meantime, the Council and its partners continue to actively pursue development opportunities such as vacant town centre sites and the development of the EuroKent Business Park, in readiness for when the market improves.

The Audit Commission

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

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

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

www.audit-commission.gov.uk
