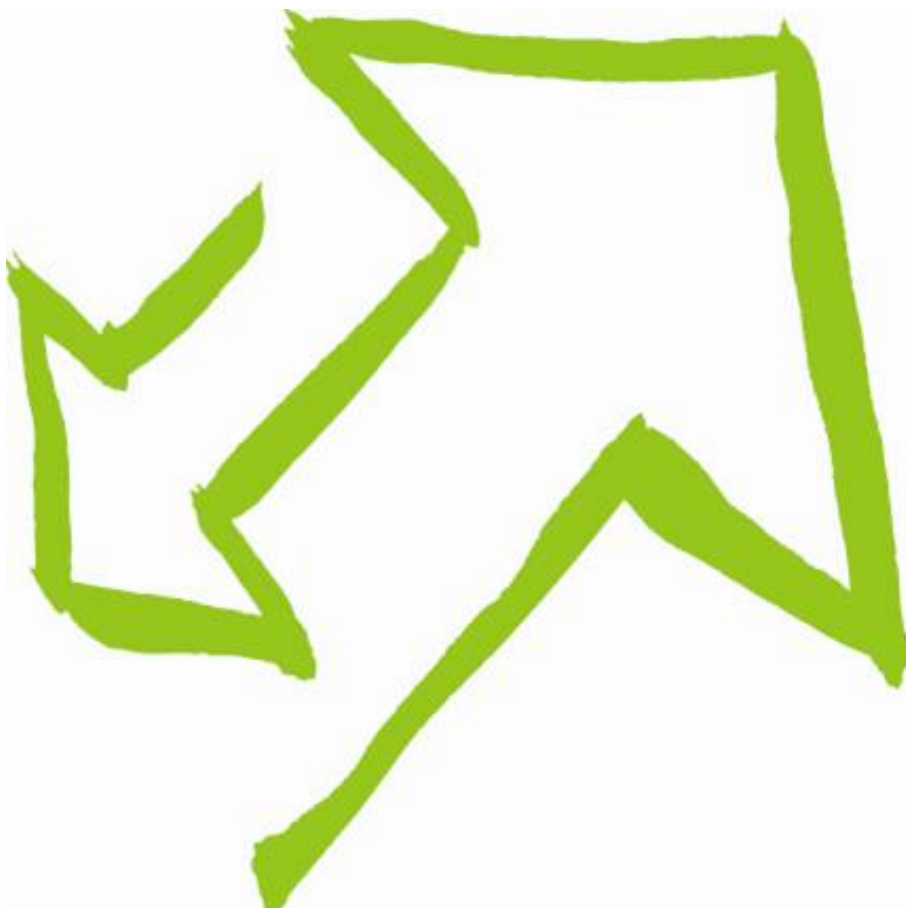


Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

December 2008



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Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement and Improvement

Executive summary

- 3 The Council has made strong progress since its last CPA inspection in 2004. As a result, its CPA category has now improved to Excellent.
- 4 The previous CPA report had found that councillors and officers, and the different political groups, were not working well together and as a result leadership had suffered. The Council is tangibly a different organisation now compared to four years ago. Relationships between councillors and officers, and between political groups, are productive, and have been for some years. The different roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers are well understood and respected. Councillors work well together across party groups on the key issues and challenges facing the borough, such as economic regeneration, strengthening local communities, and planning the Council's budget. As a result, good progress is now being made on town centre redevelopment in Hinckley, an issue that residents have wanted the Council to address for nearly 20 years.
- 5 This constructive and collective leadership by councillors, along with strong managerial leadership, has contributed to the Council having a robust and healthy organisational culture. Good communications, investment in training and development, and excellent relationships with the trade union have created a culture where staff feel able to put forward ideas to improve services. Staff are proud to work for the Council, and as a result they focus strongly on the needs of their customers.
- 6 This improved leadership by councillors and officers is also evident in the way that the Council works with partner organisations to improve local quality of life. The Council's key strategic partnerships - its Community Safety Partnership and Local Strategic Partnership - have both been reviewed and strengthened. They now focus much more effectively on shared objectives and on outcomes. As a result, crime levels have reduced significantly over the last year. Focus on priority neighbourhoods is strong and partners in Hinckley and Bosworth are working well together to tackle the deprivation in these areas. The Council's strong community leadership is evident in the way that it has worked with North Warwickshire and Hinckley College to ensure the new college campus is built in Hinckley, linked to the development of new creative industries. The Council also works well with the voluntary and community sector to help support more disadvantaged communities.
- 7 The Council has focused well on addressing the other key weaknesses reported in the last CPA. It has significantly improved its financial management, and has prudently built up its reserves so that it can better manage future demands. The Council has invested well in its priorities. Business planning is robust, with good links from corporate priorities through to individual staff objectives. Approaches to diversity and equality have been strengthened, and the Council now has a better understanding of the impacts of its policies on its diverse communities. Performance management arrangements are robust, and are used to drive service improvement and challenge value for money.

Executive summary

- 8 As a result of this robust performance management and sustained focus on priorities, services have improved significantly. Excellent progress has been made in priority areas relating to recycling, street cleaning and meeting the decent homes standard. Seventy four per cent of the Council's Best Value performance indicators improved last year, and half are in the best performing category compared to other councils, well above the district council average.
- 9 A number of challenges remain, although the Council is aware of these and is actively addressing them. Some aspects of the housing service are underperforming but improvements are taking place. Workforce planning is developing well, although it has yet to become fully embedded. The Local Strategic Partnership is now much more focused on key objectives and outcomes but performance management of the partnership is at an early stage and not yet fully effective. There are some gaps in the Council's strategic framework because of recent changes to priorities and a subsequent period of adjustment whilst strategies are revised. This has not prevented the Council from pragmatically pursuing opportunities but in some cases this is in the absence of a clear strategy, for example in exploring possibilities for sharing services with other Councils. Sound strategic planning helps councils to remain focused and avoid distractions.

Areas for improvement

- 10 The Council should now ensure that it has a complete strategic planning framework to underpin its ambitions and ensure focus and clarity of purpose. This will help it to improve strategic decision making and ensure that its actions support the overall vision for the area. This is particularly important for the regeneration and economic development priorities.
- 11 The Council should ensure that its approaches to sharing services with other organisations are part of a coherent strategy designed to maximise value for money and secure better outcomes for local people.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*	Weighted score
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3	6
	Prioritisation	3	6
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3	6
	Performance management	3	6
What has been achieved?	Achievement and Improvement	3	21
Weighted score		45	
CPA category		Excellent	

*Key to scores

- 1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance
- 2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance
- 3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well
- 4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly

**Banding thresholds for determining CPA category

Category	Required score
Excellent	45-60
Good	36-44
Fair	28-35
Weak	21-27
Poor	20 or less

Context

The locality

- 12** Hinckley and Bosworth is a largely rural borough of 297 square kilometres in south-west Leicestershire. The majority of the 103,800 population live in the southern urban areas of Hinckley, Burbage, Barwell and Earl Shilton. There are also sizeable settlements near the Leicester fringe to the east, and in the central and northern parts of the borough. In addition to its links with other areas of Leicestershire, the borough has close links with the neighbouring town of Nuneaton, in Warwickshire.
- 13** Historically, the economy of the area has relied on manufacturing (mainly textile, hosiery, and shoe manufacture), coal mining, and farming. The economy still retains higher than average levels of manufacturing despite the decline of traditional and mining industries. Good road links via the M1, M69 and A5 have encouraged the growth of warehousing and distribution in recent years. Farming remains the mainstay of the rural economy, complemented by tourism.
- 14** Unemployment, at four per cent, is lower than regional and national averages, and overall deprivation levels are relatively low. The borough ranks 275 (out of 354 districts) on the national Index of Multiple Deprivation, where 1 is the most deprived. However, there are some pockets of acute deprivation, particularly in parts of Earl Shilton, Barwell, Hinckley, Burbage and Bagworth. As a result of this deprivation, these areas have been identified in the countywide Local Area Agreement as priority neighbourhoods. Crime and disorder levels have reduced over the last year, particularly in the priority neighbourhoods, and are now about average when compared with similar authorities.
- 15** Industrial decline in the borough's main town of Hinckley has left a rich heritage of buildings, but also a need for economic regeneration. Household income in the borough is above the regional average, but this is due largely to outward commuting. Local jobs tend to be comparatively lower paid, and the more deprived parts of the borough experience lower levels of skills. Significant housing growth is planned for both Earl Shilton and Barwell.
- 16** The population is less diverse than some parts of the region, with black and minority ethnic residents making up just 2.1 per cent of the population, compared to the regional average of 6.4 per cent. However, there is a significant traveller community, particularly in the settled 'Costalot' community near Bagworth, as well as newer migrant communities from EU accession countries such as Poland. The proportion of older people is above the national average and is projected to rise significantly in future years.
- 17** Overall, people in Hinckley and Bosworth are healthy. Life expectancy is above the national average for both men and women. However, children are less physically active than the national average, and childhood obesity is a particular challenge. The Local Area Agreement for Leicestershire includes targets on both physical activity and reducing childhood obesity.

- 18 The borough has some significant cultural attractions, including Twycross Zoo, Bosworth battlefield, the Battlefield railway, and Bosworth Water Trust Leisure Park. The borough's tourism industry relies mainly on day visits, and there are limited bed and breakfast facilities. The inclusion of the National Forest in the north and east of the borough provides further opportunities for recreational and wildlife habitat development.

The Council

- 19 Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has 34 councillors: 19 Liberal Democrat, 13 Conservative and 2 Labour. The Liberal Democrats hold the majority administration. Prior to the May 2007 election the Conservatives held the majority administration. The Council has a Leader and Executive form of governance, with the Executive appointed by full Council. The Executive has eight members: the Leader of the Council (responsible for strategic direction), the Deputy Leader (responsible for culture and development), and Executive Members for housing and community safety, rural affairs, waste collection, parks and open space, finance and corporate services.
- 20 The Council has a Scrutiny Commission, chaired by the Leader of the Labour group, and two Overview and Scrutiny Committees: the Council Services Select Committee (chaired by a Conservative councillor), and the Finance and Audit Select Committee (chaired by a Liberal Democrat councillor). The Scrutiny Commission has 15 members, including the Chairs of the two Select Committees, who are the Vice Chairs of the Scrutiny Commission. The Select Committees each have ten members. The Council also has a Standards Committee and various regulatory committees.
- 21 Services are provided through three directorates, covering Corporate and Scrutiny Services, Community and Planning Services, and Finance. A number of services are outsourced, for example housing repairs, dry recycling and ICT. In order to strengthen both its strategic leadership and operational focus, the Council restructured its management teams in 2007 to create the Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) and the Corporate Operational Board (COB). SLB comprises the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and two directors, with COB comprising five heads of service.
- 22 The Council has a number of key partnerships in place, including its Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Community Safety Partnership (the borough's statutory crime and disorder reduction partnership). The Council is a signatory to the county-wide Local Area Agreement (LAA), which is an agreement between the government and public service agencies to improve quality of life for people in Leicestershire. The county has had two LAAs, the first one signed in 2006 (LAA1), and the second one (LAA2) agreed with the government in June 2008.
- 23 For 2007/08 the Council set a revenue budget of £10.49 million. For the same year the Borough Council's portion of the council tax was set at £102.32 for a Band D property, which was well below the district council average.

Context

- 24 In its last CPA inspection in 2004, the Council was assessed as Fair. Strengths included the overall quality of service provision and sustained ambitions based on consultation. Weaknesses were mainly associated with the authority's governance, and included poor working relationships at senior levels, lack of a strategic approach to people management, underdeveloped financial planning, and weak performance management.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

Ambition

- 25 The Council is performing well in this area. Ambitions are clear and challenging and are based on a good understanding of the needs of local communities. Partners focus well on shared objectives, particularly in addressing the needs of priority neighbourhoods. The Council is pragmatic about getting on and delivering its ambitions, even when the underpinning strategies are still under development. The Council provides strong community leadership, and works closely with a range of partners. It has recently refreshed its key strategic partnerships and as a result these partnerships are now working more effectively.
- 26 The Council has clear ambitions for its communities, and these are shared with partner organisations. The borough's community plan 2007-2012 was approved by the LSP in April 2007, and sets out a number of shared priorities under the following themes: thriving communities, a vibrant economy, better access to services, improved health, a high quality environment, more efficient use of resources, and housing for everyone's needs. The community plan reflects the priorities in the countywide community strategy, and it also sets out a longer term vision of what the borough will look like in 2026.
- 27 Ambitions are challenging and address the needs of the most disadvantaged communities. The Leicestershire LAA focuses on priority neighbourhoods, which are the areas in the county that experience the most deprivation. The Council and its partners on the borough's LSP also have a very clear focus on addressing the needs of these priority neighbourhoods. Emerging masterplans for two of these areas, Earl Shilton and Barwell, set out a range of objectives which include significant housing growth, strengthening communities, and the development of a major sporting hub. This strong link to shared countywide objectives ensures that partner resources are used more effectively, rather than working separately.
- 28 Ambitions are realistic. Most of the Council's ambitions are underpinned by clear targets and strategies. For example, the ambition for thriving communities is underpinned by a robust community safety strategy and clear targets for increasing levels of volunteering. Ambitions relating to a vibrant economy and improving health do not have clear targets and joint strategies, but these are under development. However, this has not held the Council back and it has been pragmatic in taking forward work on regeneration and investing in better health. For example, plans for redevelopment of the bus station site in Hinckley are progressing well, supported by an active Town Centre Partnership which the Council has championed.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 29** Ambitions are based on a good understanding of local needs. The Council undertook widespread public and stakeholder consultation to jointly inform the community plan, the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) and the Council's corporate plan. This included public exhibitions, workshops with different communities and stakeholders, walking tours, and surveys of the borough's Citizens Panel. The community plan also draws on a robust demographic analysis of the borough. Geographical analysis has enabled it to focus attention on priority neighbourhoods in more deprived parts of the borough. Customer satisfaction is important to the Council and it carries out annual surveys to gauge this rather than just relying on the national tri-annual surveys. As a result ambitions closely match the needs of the local population.
- 30** Consultation recognises the complexity of the borough's communities and makes provision for involving people in different ways. Engagement with both younger and older people is good, facilitated by an active Youth Council and an older people's forum. Young people have directly influenced plans for town centre regeneration. The Council consults effectively with its housing tenants, and as a result tenant satisfaction with opportunities for participation, at 85 per cent, is amongst the highest nationally. The Council effectively engages with a network of disability groups, enabled through its work with Hinckley and Bosworth Voluntary Action. It also engages with the large, settled traveller community near Bagworth. The Council has recently reviewed and strengthened its consultation strategy, and this allowed it to identify gaps in community engagement. For example, it identified that it needed to consult more effectively with lesbian and gay communities, and it has already started a dialogue with appropriate representative groups. By actively engaging with different communities the Council is ensuring that its ambitions and priorities better reflect the range of needs in the borough.
- 31** The Council provides strong and effective community leadership. It has worked closely with North Warwickshire and Hinckley College to enable the development of a new college site in Hinckley, which links well to the economic regeneration of the town's Druid quarter. This development would not be happening without the Council's leadership. The Council also works effectively to strengthen communities in the more rural parts of the borough. For example, it has been a key partner in the success of the excellent community centre in Markfield, and it supports an active Parishes Forum. The Leader of the Council has led on work with partners to look at how they might better support residents affected by the economic downturn, particularly around debt management. The Council has led on the establishment of a tourism partnership for the borough, to replace the previous tourism board which was not proving sufficiently effective, and this robust leadership is welcomed by stakeholders. The Council's strong community leadership ensures that ambitions are being turned into actions which will improve quality of life for local people.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 32** Partnership working is productive and sustainable. The Council has worked well with partners to refocus both the Community Safety Partnership and the LSP. Partners had recognised that these two key partnerships needed a clearer focus on priorities and outcomes. The Community Safety Partnership was refreshed early in 2007, and it now has a much clearer focus on priorities, performance and outcomes. As a result, crime and disorder levels have reduced significantly over the last year. Improvements to the LSP are more recent, and these include a much sharper focus on priority neighbourhoods, economic regeneration, and rural access to services. Partners are strongly positive about these partnership improvements. The Council also contributes well to partnership working at a county and regional level. For example, it takes a strong lead on sport and culture issues through bodies such as the Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands. The Chief Executive chairs the district councils' county-wide children's partnership, and this has led to a common safeguarding policy across the district councils in Leicestershire.

Prioritisation

- 33** The Council is performing well in this area. It has clear priorities, which are based on what local people say is important to them. It has sustained focus on these priorities over a number of years, at the same time as improving important governance arrangements. Financial and business planning are effective, and link well to corporate priorities. Robust strategies are in place for delivering on most of the priorities in the new corporate plan. For the remaining priorities, strategies are developing well. Approaches to diversity and equality are improving steadily. The Council undertakes effective joint planning with partners, and this is improving outcomes for local people.
- 34** The Council has clear priorities within its ambitions, which link well to national priorities and to LAA themes. These priorities are set out in its corporate plan 2008-2013, and are: cleaner and greener neighbourhoods; thriving economy; safer and healthier borough; strong and distinctive communities; and decent, well managed and affordable housing.
- 35** Priorities are based on what local people say is important to them. The Council consults with its citizen's panel a number of times each year, and for the last two years has asked the panel to say which services should be prioritised. In 2006 the panel said that waste collection, recycling and community safety were their top priorities, and these are all areas where the Council has invested its resources. The decision on options for Hinckley town centre redevelopment was robustly informed by good public consultation. For example, young people said they wanted a cinema and bowling alley and these have been included in the plans. As a result, strategies and action plans are focused on things that are important to local people.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 36** The Council has sustained its focus on outcomes that will make a difference for local communities. For example, priorities in the 2005 corporate plan included achieving best quartile performance in services, recycling 45 per cent of waste by 2007/08, improving the quality of the local environment, and securing decent and well managed housing. These are all areas where the Council has made good progress. The Council has also had a number of priorities around improving its governance, for example financial and performance management. This was in response to the weaknesses highlighted in the last CPA inspection in 2004, and good progress has been made in these areas as well. As a result of the progress made, the Council has been able to reduce the number of priorities in its latest corporate plan for 2008-2013, and focus these now consistently on outcomes for the community.
- 37** Clear and robust strategies are in place for delivering priorities relating to the priority neighbourhoods. The LSP has developed clear neighbourhood action plans, with lead partners identified for each objective. The Council has appointed a neighbourhood manager, jointly with Voluntary Action Hinckley and Bosworth, to ensure delivery of these action plans. The new community safety strategy focuses on tackling areas where crime and disorder are most acute, such as in the priority neighbourhoods. A good green space strategy has led to investments in parks and play areas. By working well with partners to jointly plan and resource shared objectives, the Council ensures better use of limited public resources.
- 38** A robust strategic approach for achieving a thriving economy is developing well. A longstanding ambition to redevelop the bus station area in Hinckley is now at preferred developer stage. These plans, and a range of other infrastructure projects such as a new further education college, are aimed at reducing the loss of spend in Hinckley town and improving skills levels in the borough. However, partners do not have an overarching strategic approach to regeneration, with clear targets for the local economy. Work to date has been pragmatic, focused on getting major projects into the delivery phase. The Council and its partners fully recognise this and have produced a draft economic regeneration strategy for consultation. This contains a strategic approach and headline indicators, but it will take time to embed into the work plans of the Council and its partners.
- 39** Strategies for achieving strong and distinctive communities and a healthier borough are developing well, but are awaiting some important building blocks. Council strategies have linked well to LAA1, for example targets relating to volunteering and participation are addressed in the cultural strategy, and two physical activity co-ordinators have been appointed. The Council has delivered a number of successful health initiatives including a GP referral scheme, health walks and smoking cessation programme. However, a county wide approach to addressing obesity and meeting the LAA2 targets are still under development, awaiting input from the PCT. Although these are scheduled to be in place by the next financial year it will take time for them to be integrated into the Council's service plans.

What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 40 Priorities adequately address the needs of diverse and disadvantaged communities. The Council has recently self assessed at level 3 of the Equality Standard, having met level 2 at the end of 2007/08. It has sound equality policies, supported by diversity champions in both the SLB and Executive and by a corporate equalities steering group. All strategies have been prioritised for equality impact assessment (EIA), and these assessments are starting to make a difference. For example, the EIA of the cultural strategy identified the need to improve services for children and young people, and as a result a major new youth centre is being developed supported by government funding of £4.5 million. The Council actively worked with Transco to support their black and minority ethnic employees following a spate of racist incidents. This good community leadership gave the company reassurance about staying in the borough, rather than relocating elsewhere. Joint gypsy and traveller workshops have been held with other councils in Leicestershire to help inform identification of new travellers' sites. By improving its understanding of the diversity of need within the borough the Council is able to shape services to better meet those needs.
- 41 Staff and other stakeholders have a good understanding of the Council's priorities, and staff are very positive about working for the Council. The latest staff survey showed that 84 per cent of staff know what the Council's aims are and how they contribute to them. Ninety percent of staff say they are proud to work for the Council. Internal and external communications are good. The Chief Executive is very accessible, holding quarterly meetings with staff across all services. Public communications includes the regular Borough Bulletin, which is delivered to all households. Stakeholders say that the Council has clear priorities which focus on things that matter to local people.
- 42 Corporate, service and financial strategies are linked within a deliverable framework. Business planning is well established and links well to corporate priorities, and to individual staff targets through annual staff appraisals. Staff are actively engaged in the service planning process. The medium term financial strategy is soundly based and also links robustly to the corporate plan. For the last three years significant resources have been invested in higher priority areas, such as waste management, community safety and street cleaning, and this has resulted in good service outcomes. There has been some shift of resources away from lower priority areas, for example the Council has taken a lower capital receipt on the sale of assets in order to deliver appropriate sheltered housing for older people. The Council is seeking to manage the financial risks associated with the economic downturn, for example it is reviewing the affordability of the capital programme which depends in part on the sale of land and buildings. Robust financial strategies mean that the Council is able to deliver and sustain service improvements.
- 43 Difficult decisions are taken when necessary and focus is sustained. In 2004 the Council took an unpopular decision to move to fortnightly waste collection, and as a result recycling rates have significantly improved. The new administration has made some politically difficult decisions. It adopted a pragmatic and realistic approach to some of its manifesto commitments in order to ensure the success of the Atkins site redevelopment in Hinckley town centre. As a result work on the site, which is a key element in regeneration plans, is now progressing well.

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

Capacity

- 44 The Council is performing well in this area. It has successfully addressed the weaknesses highlighted in the last CPA inspection in 2004. Working relationships between councillors and officers, and between political groups, are productive, and leadership is strong. The ethical framework is being effectively applied. The Council is making good use of ICT, partnering and procurement to enhance services, and a sustained focus on value for money is delivering good outcomes. Risk management arrangements are sound although not always fully effective. The Council is taking a pragmatic, rather than strategic, approach to sharing services with other councils.
- 45 Leadership is strong. Relationships between political groups are constructive, with councillors working well together across all groups to provide clear leadership in areas such as the budget and town centre redevelopment. Working relationships between councillors and officers are productive, and the different roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers are understood and well respected. Staff are consistently and strongly positive about the leadership they receive from councillors, the Chief Executive and senior managers. This has created an enabling culture across the organisation, where staff feel well supported and encouraged to improve services. It has also enabled the Council to make good progress in priority areas, such as economic regeneration.
- 46 Scrutiny is making a positive contribution to improving services. It has provided constructive and robust challenge in a number of key areas, such as challenging performance on community safety, which has led to new governance arrangements for the Community Safety Partnership and significant improvements in outcomes. A review of sheltered housing options led to improved outcomes for tenants. Scrutiny work programmes focus on Council priorities and on issues that are important to local people, for example reviewing out of hours access to primary health care. The Council values highly its Scrutiny function, and this is reflected in the attention which the Executive gives to Scrutiny recommendations, and by the direct support provided to Scrutiny by the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive.

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 47 Councillors and officers work effectively within the ethical framework. The Standards Committee is independently chaired, and has been since 2005. The balance between elected and independent members on the Committee is robust. The Committee Chair and the Monitoring Officer have been proactive in undertaking regular training on ethical framework issues, and the Committee's role is well respected amongst councillors. As a result, the number of complaints about borough councillors has declined from 13, two years ago, to four, last year and none so far this year.
- 48 Risk management arrangements are sound, although they have not always been fully effective. Risk registers are in place at project, service and strategic levels, and they are routinely reported and actively discussed by managers and councillors. Risk assessment is well embedded in business planning arrangements. However, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) had a significant overspend in 2007/08, following the commencement of a new type of contract for the housing repairs service. The Council responded robustly and pragmatically to the overspend. By communicating the issues transparently, including early engagement with tenants and the local press, it managed to minimise negative impacts on the Council's reputation. Its responses to the overspend also enabled it to negotiate with the contractor a significant reduction in the Council's financial liabilities.
- 49 The Council has a clear and sustained focus on value for money. Councillors and officers routinely use information on costs and performance to review and challenge value for money. The Council has exceeded its 7.5 per cent 'Gershon' efficiency savings over the last three years, supported by good asset management arrangements. Financial management arrangements are generally sound and, apart from the HRA overspend, the Council consistently maintains spending within its overall budget. The Council has prudently built its level of reserves above the minimum requirement, as part of its medium term financial strategy, and as a result it is well placed to manage future cost and service pressures. It successfully attracts external funding to support its priorities, for example it has gained £2.4 million from the Housing Corporation to fund 99 units of affordable housing, and it recently secured £3.5 million from the East Midlands Development Agency for the Atkins regeneration initiative in Hinckley. This sustained focus has led to the Council achieving good value for money.
- 50 Strategic approaches to workforce and councillor development are good. Staff appraisals are well established and are used to inform training and development plans. Staff are positive about their access to training. Councillor development programmes are also based on needs assessment, and new councillors are supported with a thorough induction programme. The Council takes a leading role on the Leicestershire and Rutland Improvement Partnership, which gives it access to a wide range of high quality development programmes for both officers and councillors. Workforce planning has yet to become fully embedded but is developing well, and the Council already has a number of succession schemes in place such as graduate development programmes in the planning service. This investment in staff and councillor development has contributed to improving services.

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 51** Significant steps have been taken to improve staff capacity, with positive outcomes. The Council fully implemented Single Status in 2007, underpinned by excellent and productive working relationships with the staff trade union. The Council was recently re-accredited with Investors in People status for the whole organisation. Sickness absence is being effectively managed, reducing from 12.5 days in 2006/07 to 8.8 days in 2007/08, which is above average performance compared with other councils. The Council's workforce is representative of the local community. The proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) staff reflects the proportion of BME residents in the borough, and the proportion of staff with disabilities is above the national average. The Council knows where it needs to improve further. For example it recognises it needs to better capture information about the diversity of its workforce, by encouraging staff to declare disabilities.
- 52** Effective use of ICT provides increasingly accessible and customer-friendly services. The ICT system enables the customer service and contact centres to handle first time enquiries for a wide range of Council services, such as benefits, waste and council tax. The benefits service undertakes home visits and uses digital technology to scan clients' documents at their home, and as a result the speed of processing benefits applications has improved significantly. The Council is installing additional computer-enabled customer service points in other parts of the borough, for example in Markfield community centre. This aims to improve access to services for the more rural areas.
- 53** Procurement and partnering are used effectively to improve capacity. Innovative partnering with the Probation Service has provided additional staffing resources to improve street cleaning in rural areas, at minimal cost to the Council. Flexible contracting with its leisure management contractor enables the Council to review service provision as part of the annual business planning process. For example, free swimming for over 60s was introduced for no additional cost to the Council, as these were absorbed as part of wider negotiations. The Council works effectively with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to enhance service provision. For example, it is working closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau to support residents affected by the recent economic downturn. A renewed Compact was agreed with the VCS in 2007. This partnering enables the Council to bring in a wider range of resources to improve services for local people.
- 54** Limited progress is being made with sharing services with other councils, although the Council is being pragmatic about pursuing opportunities where it can. The Council shares a building control manager with North West Leicestershire District Council, and good progress is being made through the Leicestershire Enterprise Architecture Framework to ensure that council ICT systems across Leicestershire are compatible. The Council has led on developing proposals for a shared legal service across Leicestershire, as well as successfully reaching an agreement to host ICT services for Oadby and Wigston Borough Council. However a number of the councils involved have declined to take these proposals further and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council is therefore pursuing discussions with councils in neighbouring Warwickshire. This is pragmatic, but is not part of a coherent strategy; and the potential for shared services with a number of different councils does present some risk to capacity, because of the need to manage a wide range of relationships and arrangements.

Performance management

- 55** The Council is performing well in this area. Performance management arrangements are robust and are leading to good service outcomes. The Council makes good use of benchmarking to set challenging targets and improve its processes. It has a good customer focus, and uses customer feedback to improve services. It actively seeks external evaluation and challenge, and responds well to recommendations for improvement. Performance management by the Council's partnerships has recently been strengthened, and the impacts of this can be seen in reducing crime levels. However, it is too soon to see the impact of improved LSP performance management.
- 56** Performance management arrangements are robust. Performance is managed on a monthly basis at service/directorate management team level, and on a quarterly basis by SLB, COB and the Executive. Scrutiny work programmes focus effectively on performance, with quarterly service reviews and performance reports. Performance information is also published on a dedicated website, and this further enhances public accountability. Data is managed through a corporate performance management system, and data quality is good. Financial and performance reports are considered together, and this enables the Council to redirect resources in-year to tackle underperformance, for example to improve homelessness prevention. The Council also regularly reviews the performance of its key partnerships against a range of criteria including delivery of objectives and value for money. It is further strengthening its capacity to review progress against the corporate plan by developing a high level summary report that will go to senior managers and councillors. These robust arrangements allow the Council to keep a close track of how it is performing, and to take steps to quickly tackle areas that are underperforming.
- 57** Targets are clear and challenging. Challenging targets have been set around improving recycling and street cleaning, both of which have been Council priorities over a number of years. The Council targeted, and achieved, best quartile performance in street cleaning in 2007/08. It met its recycling target, and it has continued to stretch its performance with a target to achieve 50 per cent recycling by 2010. It has set a challenging target to process benefit claims and changes within nine days in 2008/09, but considers this to be realistic as it was beginning to achieve this level of performance towards the end of 2007/08. However, targets that underpin priorities relating to a healthier borough and a thriving economy are not fully developed. This is because strategies to deliver these priorities are still being prepared.
- 58** Performance management drives service improvement. All reports on underperforming indicators are accompanied by an improvement action plan. Managers and staff have a good focus on service performance, with good linkages between service objectives and individual targets. Robust challenge by Scrutiny contributed to significant reductions in crime levels and sickness absence during 2007/08. Re-let times in housing have reduced from 44 to 11 days, and performance on preventing homelessness has significantly improved, following focused attention by managers. Because of robust performance management, Council services have improved significantly over the last three years.

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 59 Benchmarking is used routinely and effectively to target improvement. Benchmarking data on top quartile performance is used to inform annual target setting. The Council used learning from a number of councils to improve the benefits service. For example, a visit to Bedford Borough Council resulted in improved staff training and better processes for dealing with backlogs. Learning from other councils was used when setting up the customer service and contact centres, to ensure they more effectively met the needs of customers. The Council has recently worked with Leicestershire County Council to help inform its flexible working project. By benchmarking its performance and processes the Council has been able to make better use of its resources and improve services.
- 60 The Council systematically seeks external evaluation and it uses this learning to improve performance. It agreed to be a pilot for the district CPA methodology in December 2005, and it used the report to help further focus its corporate improvement plans. It invited the IDeA to carry out peer reviews of both its Community Safety Partnership and LSP, and it responded positively in both cases to the recommendations for improvement. Both partnerships have improved significantly as a result. Following the recent overspend on the Housing Revenue Account, the Council rapidly brought in a number of external specialist organisations to review the underlying issues. As a result the Council has strengthened its arrangements for monitoring housing repairs. The Council gained external accreditation from the IDeA for its cultural services against the nationally recognised Towards an Excellent Service quality framework. This also included an improvement plan which the Council has integrated into its service plans. This external challenge has contributed to improvements in Council governance and in services to local people.
- 61 Customer feedback is used to improve service provision. The Council has a user-friendly complaints process, which is publicised widely including in local newspapers. Complaints are dealt with effectively, which includes regular review by managers. Customer feedback led to greater attention to street cleaning in rural areas, and was used to select areas for piloting food waste collection trials. The Council was disappointed with its overall levels of customer satisfaction in the 2006/07 tri-annual survey. As a result it now undertakes a range of annual user satisfaction surveys and uses these to set targets for improved customer satisfaction. It also uses the Govmetric exit survey in its customer service centre. Some information about the needs of diverse and disadvantaged communities is gained through mechanisms such as satisfaction with the benefits service and feedback from residents using the community house in Earl Shilton.
- 62 Partnership performance management is developing well. The Community Safety Partnership was refreshed in 2007, and it now focuses much more effectively on priorities and performance. Partners meet regularly to share information and address crime and disorder hot-spots, and projects and action plans are rigorously managed. The LSP is also now focused on delivering an appropriately rationalised number of key objectives, rather than spreading its resources too thinly. However, these improvements in LSP performance management are more recent and it is too soon to assess their impacts.

What has been achieved?

Achievement and improvement

- 63** The Council is performing well in this area. The Council has made good progress in delivering outcomes in its priority areas. Key priorities since 2005 have included improving recycling (targeting 45 per cent of waste recycled by 2007/08), achieving best quartile performance across all services, economic regeneration, improving the safety and appearance of the local environment, securing decent and well managed housing, and improving participation in sport and leisure. The Council has made good, and in some cases excellent, progress across all these priorities. For example, recycling targets have been exceeded, the speed of processing planning applications is one of the best in the country, and all Council-owned homes meet the decent homes standard. The Council has recently refreshed its corporate priorities, and these are set out in the latest corporate plan for 2008-2013. It is too soon to assess progress with some of these new priority areas, however, the Council is investing well with partners in plans to deliver them.
- 64** Overall performance, as measured by Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs), is strong. In 2006/07, 50 per cent of the Council's BVPIs were in the best performing quartile, well above the district council average of 33 per cent. These include key service areas such as recycling, benefits and planning. Seventy four per cent of BVPIs improved in 2006/07, which was also well above the district council average of 58 per cent. Looked at over a three-year timescale, the extent of BVPI improvement is closer to, but still above, the national average. Data for 2007/08 (which is unaudited) indicates that this improvement in performance has been sustained. Overall public satisfaction with the Council, at 49 per cent, was below the national average in 2006/07, although satisfaction with complaints handling was in the best performing category. The Council's own recent surveys of people using services, whilst not directly comparable to the 2006/07 surveys, show much higher levels of satisfaction. For example, in 2007/08, 87 per cent of users said they were satisfied with the benefits service.
- 65** Key customer facing services have improved significantly. In 2005/06 the Council was in the worst performing category for processing housing benefits applications. It improved significantly in 2006/07, with further improvements in 2007/08. It is now amongst the best performing 25 per cent of councils. The Council has made a 'golden promise' to benefits applicants, that if they are able to bring in a complete application then the Council will process their application that same day. In August 2008 the Council delivered 69 'golden promises'. Planning applications are also processed quickly, following robust reviews of business processes. Performance on all types of planning application was one of the best in the country in 2007/08, and over 54 per cent of planning applications are now made on-line, the highest in the East Midlands.

What has been achieved?

- 66 Access to services is improving, supported by a good focus on customers. Customer satisfaction with the Council's customer service and contact centres is high, and telephone calls are answered promptly. The Council has taken steps to tailor services to the needs of more vulnerable groups. For example, refuse collection vehicles use satellite technology to identify houses whose occupants require special help with their waste collection. Take up of benefits is actively promoted through outreach work such as visits to GP surgeries. The excellent and innovative community house in Earl Shilton provides a range of services to residents in a deprived part of the borough, including programmes to strengthen young people's pride in their area. Because of its location in the heart of the community, the house provides services that are very accessible for local residents. Equality impact assessments are beginning to have an impact, for example recently improved engagement with lesbian and gay residents.

Cleaner and greener neighbourhoods

- 67 Performance on ensuring cleaner and greener neighbourhoods is strong. In 2006/07, the Council recycled or composted 43 per cent of household waste, which was in the best performing category nationally. It further improved this to just under 46 per cent in 2007/08, and it delivers the lowest cost per household waste collection service in Leicestershire. In response to public feedback, the Council has fully resourced plans in place to introduce kerbside recycling for plastics and cardboard in early 2009. The amount of waste collected reduced in 2007/08, although it is still above the national average. The BVPI survey in 2006/07 showed low levels of public satisfaction with the Council's waste service; however more recent surveys of people using the service show high levels of satisfaction.
- 68 Streets and other public spaces are kept clean, and the borough benefits from good quality parks. The Council is in the best performing 25 per cent of councils for keeping land clear of litter, fly-posting and graffiti. The number of 'bring' sites where people can recycle their refuse has increased, particularly in rural areas. Public satisfaction with parks and open spaces was low when surveyed in 2006/07. In response, the Council has started to implement its green space strategy, with significant investments in parks and play areas. Granville Recreation Ground, Clarendon Park and Argents Mead are now much improved and they are well used by the public.

Thriving economy

- 69 Good progress is being made with economic regeneration. Work is already underway to redevelop the former Atkins factory site in Hinckley as the site for the new college and a new creative enterprise centre. The Druid Quarter masterplan has resulted in improvements to four factory sites, the conversion of two former factories into residential units, and 100 jobs created via business start-up units in the former Lord factory. Local people can therefore see the benefits from these investments.

- 70** The Council actively invests in local businesses, to create the building blocks for future growth. It has invested £44,000 in new market stalls, and as a result the thriving Hinckley market, which operates three days a week, has an attractive and welcoming shopping environment. The Council provides 65 business start-up units at four different sites in the borough. The Council supported the successful bid by Twycross Zoo for £3 million from the East Midlands Development Agency for a new visitor centre at the zoo. It contributed a grant of £50,000 towards the refurbishment of the successful Concordia Theatre, which is one of the largest voluntary-run theatres in the country. This refurbishment includes providing better access to the theatre for customers who are disabled.

Safer and healthier borough

- 71** Good progress is being made with improving community safety in the borough. Crime has reduced significantly over the last year, from comparatively high levels. This is because of good, focused partnership working through the borough's Community Safety Partnership. Overall crime is down by 16 per cent, which equates to 1,000 fewer victims of crime, and criminal damage is down by 19 per cent. Excellent work with the Probation Service on engaging ex-offenders in delivering environmental services has contributed to the Council and its partners achieving Beacon status for reducing re-offending. Partners have run a number of successful schemes to improve the safety of people using the town centre during the evening. For example, the Christmas 'lock 'em Inn' initiative reduced the levels of anti-social behaviour associated with the night time economy.
- 72** Good progress has been made with delivering priorities relating to health. The Council has had longstanding priorities to improve access to, and increase participation in, cultural and sporting activities, and to meet its LAA targets. Sustained focus on delivering a robust cultural strategy, and effective performance management arrangements, have resulted in good outcomes. Access to leisure facilities in the borough are above the national average, and levels of participation in sport and active recreation are in the best performing category nationally. In 2007/08, 480 people attended the Council's Heart Smart scheme, and the Council has exceeded its Leicestershire LAA1 physical activity targets. In the same year, 600 people were helped to quit smoking. In response to declining public satisfaction levels with leisure and sports facilities, and as part of its regeneration and housing growth strategies, the Council has robust plans to build a new leisure centre closer to Earl Shilton and Barwell, part of a new sporting hub in the area. Plans to deliver LAA2 targets are under development with partners.

Strong and distinctive communities

- 73** This is a new priority for the Council and it is therefore too soon to say if all the associated targets are being met. However, one of the targets under this priority is to improve the levels of volunteering in the community, and the levels of volunteering in sport and active recreation are high. Another of the targets is to improve staff satisfaction with the Council as an employer. The latest staff survey showed that 92 per cent of staff are satisfied working for the Council.

What has been achieved?

- 74** Good progress has been made in other areas that support stronger communities. Partners have been successful in promoting summer activities for children and young people over the last four years through the LSP's 'What's Going Down' brochure. The community centre in Markfield is very well used by the local community and the Council has supported work to extend the centre because of demand. The community centre is also being upgraded to provide a 'touch down' point for Council staff and partners such as the police, to bring services closer to the local community. The LSP supports a community bus which provides a service to nearly 500 residents.

Decent, well managed and affordable housing

- 75** Good progress has been made with improving Council owned homes. All of the Council's housing stock meets the decent homes standard, and their energy efficiency is amongst the best councils nationally. Tenant satisfaction, at 95.7 per cent, is also one of the highest nationally, as are rent collection rates. The time taken to complete urgent housing repairs has improved following the re-tendering of the housing repairs contract in 2006, and tenant satisfaction with the repairs service is high, however it is underperforming compared with other councils. The Council recognises that it can improve its comparative performance on housing repairs and is taking action to do this.
- 76** Robust strategies for meeting housing needs are delivering good outcomes. Targets for affordable housing completions have been achieved for the last five years. The Council has responded pragmatically to the current housing market by allowing a higher proportion of affordable housing in new developments, and it recently gained tenant nomination rights for nine housing units which could not be sold on the open market. The Council has actively worked to prevent homelessness, for example it has invested in mediation to prevent family breakdown and this has reduced the proportion of young people becoming homeless. It has significantly reduced the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for housing homeless families. However, the use of hostel accommodation is still much higher than national averages, although this is reducing. The number of vacant private sector homes brought back into occupation is in the worst performing category compared with other councils, however given the local context this is not a priority activity for the Council.

Appendix 1 – Framework for Corporate Assessment

- 1 This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2 The Council's self assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
 - key documentation, including the Council's improvement plan;
 - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
 - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 15 to 19 September 2008.
- 4 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the Council.

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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: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

www.audit-commission.gov.uk
