

Inspection report

March 2004



# **Comprehensive performance assessment**

**Wychavon District Council**

# Contents

Introduction	3
Summary of Comprehensive Performance Assessment judgements	4
Summary of assessment scores	5
Recommendations	7
Context	8
The locality	8
The council	8
What is the council trying to achieve?	10
Ambition	10
Prioritisation	11
Focus	12
How has the council set about delivering its priorities?	13
Capacity	13
Performance management	15
What has the council achieved / not achieved to date?	16
Achievement in quality of service	16
Achievement of improvement	18
Investment	20
In the light of what the council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	22
Learning	22
Future plans	23
Appendix 1 - Balancing housing markets (BHM) diagnostic assessment	28
Appendix 2 - Public space diagnostic assessment	35
Appendix 3 - Appointed auditor assessment	46
Appendix 4 - Benefit Fraud Inspectorate assessment	47
Appendix 5 - Framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment	49

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## Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is part of the wider agenda set out in the Local Government White Paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services*. The White Paper encourages greater focus on improved services for local people by freeing good councils from central government controls and restrictions, and providing poorer councils with more, and better focused, support for improvement. CPA is the first step in this process, that of making an overall judgement of where each council stands.
- 2 This report presents an analysis of the council's overall performance as well as two short diagnostic assessments which cover important areas of responsibility. It also includes an assessment of the council's benefit service by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, and the appointed auditor's assessment of performance on each of the main elements of the code of audit practice. The appendices to this report set out further details on the findings of these assessments and the framework for CPA.
- 3 The official version of this report is also available on the Audit Commission's web site at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk). The Audit Commission cannot verify the accuracy of and is not responsible for material contained in this report which has been reproduced by another organisation or individual.

## Summary of Comprehensive Performance Assessment judgements

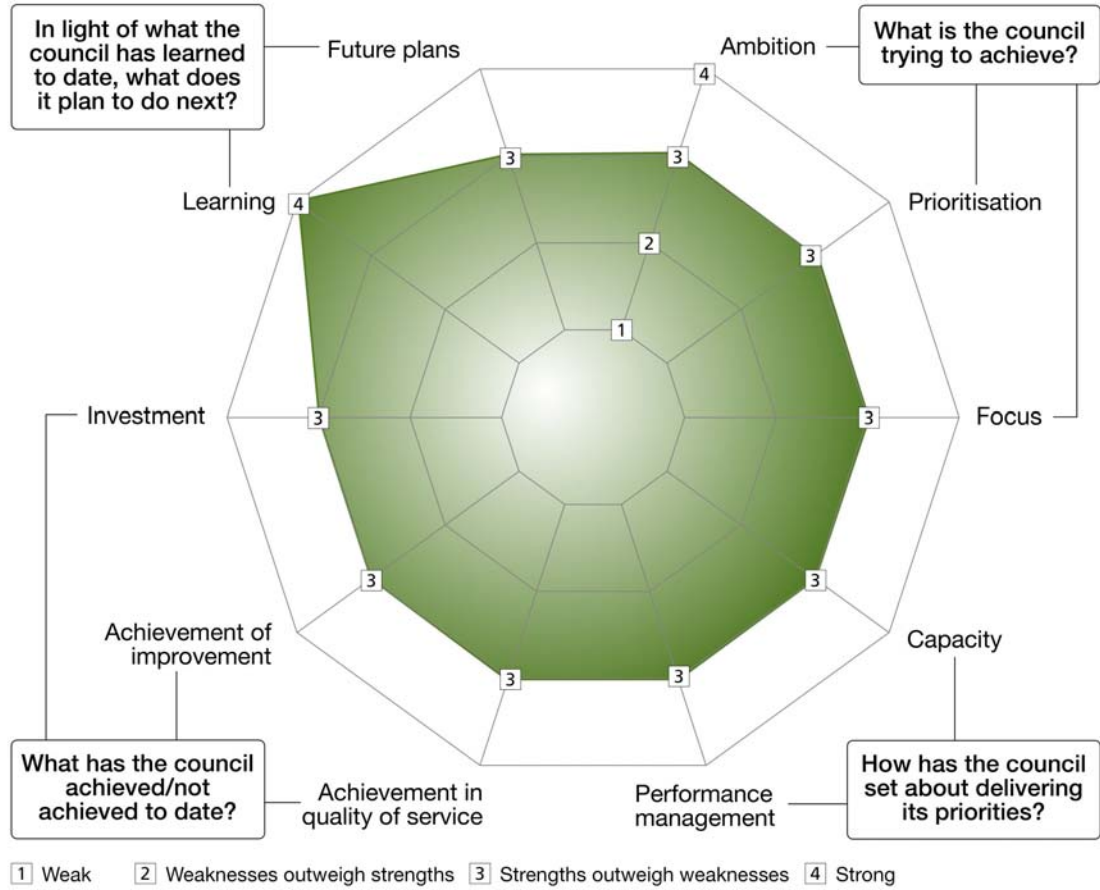
- 4 Wychavon District Council is a good and improving council which has laid robust foundations to enhance the quality of services that local people receive. The council has improved its corporate processes and put into place key pieces of work around issues like social inclusion and performance monitoring but these are new and still need to be embedded.
- 5 Wychavon District Council has high satisfaction rates for many of its services and has ambitions to improve them whilst maintaining the annual council tax increase to 2.5 per cent. The community plan now provides a long term vision of the district and this is supported by the council's Priorities and Promises (Ps & Ps).
- 6 Councillors and senior management team provide strong leadership. The council benefits from having a committed and enthusiastic workforce who pride themselves on providing good services for local people. Financial management is strong and the council has a medium term financial plan in place to support its expenditure on services for the next three years. It is currently working on a five year plan to help shape the longer term financial vision for the council. Partnership working is mainly strong and has been used to increase the council's capacity to deliver local projects designed to meet the specific needs of local communities. On a larger scale partnership working has been countywide with national recognition by Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) for work on the Worcestershire Hub Project which makes services more accessible.
- 7 Performance management is an area that the council has focused on over the last twelve months. A set of key performance indicators have been agreed and these are monitored across the board by Executive, Overview and Scrutiny and Senior Management Team (SMT). Service heads now have a clear sense of how their services perform and know they are accountable for delivering improvements to the public. Whilst the Overview function is proving effective through its task and finish group approach, Scrutiny is still under-developed and does not provide the Executive Board with robust challenge. The council also recognise that risk management still needs to be embedded across all services.
- 8 Wychavon provides good services overall with the exception of housing which, although in the process of recovery, is currently poor. The council has secured considerable external investment for major projects in the district and has also invested in internal processes to strengthen capacity.
- 9 The council is self aware and has learned from internal and external challenge. It volunteered as a pathfinder for CPA and has addressed all of the Audit Commission's recommendations and has shared its learning with other councils. Future plans are related to community ambitions and include clear milestones and a framework for short and long-term improvements. However, risk issues around some future plans are not fully assessed.

## Summary of assessment scores

NB – Weighted Scores - please remember to multiply the themes of achievement in quality of service and achievement of improvement by three, and the theme of investment by two.

Top level question	Theme	Grade	Weighted score
What is the council trying to achieve?	Ambition	3	3
	Prioritisation	3	3
	Focus	3	3
How has the council set about delivering its priorities?	Capacity	3	3
	Performance management	3	3
What has the council achieved/not achieved to date?	Achievement in quality of service	3	9
	Achievement of improvement	3	9
	Investment	3	6
In light of what the council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	Learning	4	4
	Future plans	3	3
<b>Weighted score</b>			<b>46</b>
<b>Corporate assessment category</b>			<b>Good</b>

## Wychavon District Council



Wychavon District Council scored well in ten out of ten of the areas assessed.

## Recommendations

- 10 It is recommended that the council:
- ◆ actively and promptly shares the findings of this assessment with the public, partner organisations, councillors and staff; and
  - ◆ uses the strengths and weaknesses identified in this report as the basis for its improvement planning.

## Context

### The locality

- 11 Wychavon District Council is the largest of the six districts in Worcestershire covering an area of 260 square miles. The district is a mix of market towns and rural communities; the three main centres of population are the towns of Droitwich Spa, Evesham and Pershore. The area has a population of around 113, 076, in 49,111 households. Wychavon is predicting a significant increase in population by 2011, a growth of 5.8 per cent, which is much higher than forecast for Worcestershire and higher than the national average. The area has above average home ownership and an above average satisfaction rating – 89 per cent are satisfied with the area as a place to live.
- 12 Based on the 2001 census information, Wychavon has a low black and ethnic minority population with 1.2 per cent of the population; travellers form the largest minority ethnic grouping.
- 13 In terms of employment – distribution, automotive, food and public service are the most important sector and the district attracts around 3.5million visitors each year. The Vale of Evesham is a significant centre for producing fruit and vegetables. Unemployment in the district is low at 1.5 per cent in 2002, compared to the national average of 3.5 per cent. There are an estimated 4,000 businesses in the district. These range from a few larger manufacturing and distribution industries in the north with its closer links to the West Midlands conurbations, to a large number of small scale businesses in more rural areas.

### The council

- 14 The Conservatives hold overall political control with 31 of the 45 seats, the Liberal Democrats hold 12 seats, Labour have 2. The council adopted a new political structure in May 2002 with a leader and executive board. This is supported by an overview and scrutiny committee which is predominately conservative based as required by political balance regulations but with representatives from other parties, a development control and licensing committee and a standards committee. The council's net revenue budget for 2002/03 was £10.5million revenue and £5.9million for capital expenditure. The council has a managing director supported by eight heads of service. There are 270 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff and is the second largest employer in the area.
- 15 In 1994 the council transferred its housing stock under LSVT<sup>1</sup> to two housing associations. Although there has been some housing development there is a shortage of social and affordable housing in the district. This shortage is exacerbated by the increase in property prices and the influx of people from other areas. Homelessness within the district is increasing and the council reported that there had recently been a 24 per cent rise in the number of approaches from homeless applicants.

<sup>1</sup> Large Scale Voluntary Transfer.

- 16 The council's aim, as set out in its annual report for 2003/04, is to:  
*'Work in partnership with our community to develop a council that provides value for money services and opportunities to meet the ever changing needs of the community with an improvement year on year'*.
  
- 17 The council carried out, as requested, a scored self-assessment for this inspection against each of the corporate assessment themes. The self-assessment was informed by a peer review commissioned by the council and undertaken by WMLGA and excellence in business in October 2003. Using the Audit Commission's scoring mechanism the council has assessed itself as 'excellent'.
  
- 18 The WMLGA peer review found that the council had made considerable progress against the action plans drawn up following the peer challenge and CPA pathfinder inspection last year. Most notably, progress had been made with the community plan, performance management, financial strategy and staff and Councillor development. The two key areas for further improvement were: social inclusion needs to be embedded throughout the organisation; and scrutiny arrangements still need to demonstrate robust 'challenge' to the decision-making process of the executive board.

## What is the council trying to achieve?

### Ambition

- 19 Strengths outweigh weaknesses for ambition.
- 20 The council has tangible ambitions and these are clearly stated in its five year strategy– ‘Wychavon’s Way Ahead’. This clearly sets out the vision for the area of a healthy, safe, vibrant and diverse communities living in a clean and green environment and is regularly reviewed.
- 21 The council has a robust community plan. The plan ‘Making Life Sweeter for you’ (March 2003) provides a long-term vision that strengthens the council’s priorities to make them more ambitious and directly embraces social inclusion. The council’s ambitions have been determined by consulting with partners and the community, for example, the community plan is based on issues that people have told the council are important to them, e.g. reducing crime and the fear of crime. It also builds on the council’s role and is linked to key council plans to deliver social inclusion, the housing agenda, health leadership and creating vibrant communities.
- 22 At the beginning of 2002/03 the council reviewed its aims and objectives to take on board both national priorities and the views of local people. This has resulted in the production of ‘priorities and promises’ (Ps & Ps). For 2003/04 these are:
- ◆ Priority One – a well managed council.
  - ◆ Priority Two – a healthy and safe environment, now and for the future.
  - ◆ Priority Three – a prosperous local economy.

These priorities are supported by 26 promises. These promises reflect the views of the majority of local people as well as national priorities. The council has made extensive use of the MORI representative survey which has provided a strong basis for priorities. They are underpinned by a clear set of values - ASPIRE:

- ◆ **A**iming for excellence.
  - ◆ **S**ervice with sincerity and a smile.
  - ◆ **P**utting customers first.
  - ◆ **I**nnovating to improve.
  - ◆ **R**eaching out to everyone.
  - ◆ **E**mbracing challenge and change.
- 23 The council demonstrates active and visible leadership. It is very clearly Councillor led and officer driven, and provides strong leadership in service delivery through its Ps & Ps which translate clearly into service plans. These have quantifiable targets, for example, using technology to improve services and

access – 85 per cent of council business to be delivered using technology by April 2004.

- 24 The council provides strong leadership to the community through partnerships and proactive community leadership roles e.g. Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). Most recent action includes asking Aquila, the local power company to come and explain to a public meeting why powercuts had been so wide spread and lengthy during gales last winter. The purpose of this was to voice community concerns and to try to prevent the problem happening again.
  
- 25 The council ensures that ambitions are clearly understood and owned by all Councillors and staff through effective internal leadership. Joint meetings of Senior Management Team (SMT) and the Executive Board now take place quarterly to review and monitor performance. Portfolio holders also work very closely with Heads of Service and middle managers to provide direction and to review progress informally.
  
- 26 The council has started to give clear leadership to strategies to build cohesive and sustainable communities. Since the pathfinder inspection, the council has set out explicitly how it will provide effective leadership and direction on social inclusion and equalities. The Executive Board of the council has assigned responsibility to leading on these key areas to two of its Councillors. However, the social inclusion strategy was only adopted in October 2003 and the council acknowledges that it is not yet delivering.
  
- 27 The council has not provided a clear leadership role in supporting and facilitating the housing needs of the community. Following the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) of its housing stock in 1994, the council did not see housing as a main priority or a high agenda activity. Although the emphasis has recently changed, the new leadership role of the council in this area has not yet been established. Affordable housing has become a problem for the district and homelessness has significantly increased.

## Prioritisation

- 28 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in prioritisation.
  
- 29 Priorities are ambitious and promises reflect the current national agenda and important issues to local people. The council has identified three key priorities for 2003/04 and these are based on the MORI representative survey results. The three priorities are underpinned by promises which directly respond to public concerns identified through various forms of consultation, e.g. community forums. These promises are realistic and directly address issues such as flood alleviation and reducing crime. Key national priorities are addressed effectively through the Local Plan and the Homelessness Strategy.
  
- 30 The council is effective at consulting with all sections of the community and uses this information to plan and deliver its services. The council uses robust intelligence from consultation to ensure that its priorities are based on things that are seen as important to the majority of people. The MORI representative survey provided a strong basis for council priorities as did the community forums which are council led.

- 31 The annual programme options process is a mechanism through which the council identifies areas for growth and extra resources. Promises are determined before the budget and service plan process enabling service managers to link bids to the council's key priorities.
- 32 The council has gained a local reputation for clearly communicating its priorities and achievements through innovative and award winning publications such as the pizza and chocolate box leaflets which show people what services they can receive from the council. Other examples include readable annual reports to summarise council priorities, performance and plans and the revised website.
- 33 The council effectively uses internal communication to ensure ownership of priorities, for example, there are council wide briefings to all staff, team briefings, a monthly 'ASPIRE' staff newsletter and Intranet access. Also staff are clear about their contribution to council priorities through the annual appraisal scheme which has explicit links to personal objectives.
- 34 The council has not identified local non-priorities. For example, the council has produced a list of non-priorities but these are functions it is not directly responsible for delivering – and it is contributing to these via partnership working. The council will continue to deliver all local services by using external resources to fund the 'nice but not essential' service improvements at a community level.
- 35 There is no evidence that the council has shifted resources away from low priority areas to fund its priorities, or that it has had to make difficult decisions because of its strong financial position. However, the council does move resources where identified in an under spend of service budgets to fund priorities. For example, £60,000 from capital sewage to fund street scene and river bank improvements in Evesham.
- 36 The council's intelligence to inform the housing strategy and priorities is limited. For example, the private sector stock information is nine years old and although new research has been commissioned, this will not be available until June 2004. The current housing strategy is therefore based on information that is out of date. In addition, the council's limited knowledge of dwellings that require refurbishment or adaptations is poor, contributing to the council's grant allocation for 2002/03 being under spent by approximately a third, a loss of important resources that could have benefited the community.

## **Focus**

- 37 Strengths outweigh weaknesses on focus.
- 38 The council's priorities and promises provide a strategic focus for managers to deliver the three corporate priorities and drive service delivery. To remain focused the council revisits and refines its priorities annually. A good example being that the council has redefined its third priority to include explicit focus on social inclusion, e.g. 'reaching out to everyone' which is a commitment to the public to address all exclusion issues and to make services more accessible.
- 39 Both Councillors and officers are aware of the priorities the council has identified and there is a strong culture of 'we will deliver'. For example, there has been a

clear and consistent focus on improving the planning service since 1999 which has resulted in the council achieving top quartile performance in 2002/03.

- 40 The Executive Board and Senior Management Team have the ability to maintain focus over time to deliver what matters to local people, for example, council tax rises have been kept to a minimum. This is helped by robust meeting agendas, forward planning, action plans and management structures which all help to maintain focus.
- 41 The council does not allow distractions to divert it from its priorities. An example of this is the council's involvement in the Lido project at Droitwich. This is a high profile issue for the community and despite two contractors pulling out of redevelopment programmes, the council has maintained its focus and has considered a third option which is to encourage the leisure contractor to take this project on board and this has enabled local people to retain this facility.
- 42 The council uses reviews to maintain focus. For example, the council has conducted a self assessment resulting in a number strategies being identified as having low effectiveness. They include key plans such as the Community Safety Strategy, and Cultural Strategy. The council has developed an action plan to remedy issues around non deliverance which is regularly monitored at SMT.
- 43 The scrutiny function is currently insufficiently focused on identifying and challenging poor performance. For example, at a recent Overview and Scrutiny meeting poor performance in the housing service was not commented upon despite the portfolio holder attending in order to respond to any direct challenge.
- 44 Although the council has a reasonable track record of focusing on service delivery it lost focus on major housing issues. The council transferred its housing stock in 1994 and although it retained the statutory responsibility, the service was considered to be a low profile activity. This resulted in a poor performance in housing which has yet to improve.

## How has the council set about delivering its priorities?

### Capacity

- 45 Strengths outweigh weaknesses on capacity.
- 46 The council has strong leadership and capable managers and staff. The constructive relationship between officers and Councillors ensures that structures are working effectively and efficiently. Both Councillors and officers are clear about the corporate priorities and their roles and responsibilities for performance improvement in key areas.
- 47 Both Councillors and officers have a good understanding of the new ethical framework and the standards committee is now firmly established. To date there have been no complaints against Wychavon Councillors which have required investigation and this is a reflection of the good atmosphere within the council.
- 48 The council now has a Human Resource (HR) strategy 'Our People Plan', which has been used to identify gaps in policies and practices and to drive forward staff development goals. It also has direct links to the equal opportunity policy and

race equality scheme ensuring that all personnel and recruitment practices incorporate these two key areas of work. The council has still to complete a skills audit of some of its staff and Councillors, but has already launched a skills based development programme for middle managers which provides an opportunity for sharing learning and networking across the council.

- 49 The workforce of the council is relatively stable and there is little staff turnover. The recent staff survey showed that staff had a high level of satisfaction with their work. The council believes that staff are one of its most valuable assets and to demonstrate this 1.5 per cent of salary budget is allocated to training to enhance staff skills/knowledge to further implement service improvements. The council acknowledges that its performance in relation to sickness absence is poor and this is as a result of three people having long term sickness.
- 50 Succession planning within the council is robust. Transition arrangements for the new Managing Director (MD) are well developed. The current MD retires in March 2004 and the new MD designate is already in place having had the benefit of shadowing the current MD for several months.
- 51 The external auditors have confirmed that the council has the financial capacity to drive service improvement and has sound financial management practices. To demonstrate this, the council was able to limit council tax increase in April 2003 to 2.5 per cent. The council has started to develop its latest medium-term financial strategy based upon a balanced approach to savings, investments, and targeting collection, debt management and external funding. The council has 'debt-free' status. It currently has level of reserves of £41 million. The council has received additional external funding because of its good track record of delivery. For example, £15,000 was allocated by Advantage West Midlands (AWM) for the Evesham Waterside Park.
- 52 The council is effective at using alternative methods of service delivery to maximise capacity. The council has an effective procurement strategy which is well embedded. Examples include, the Leisure Trust, outsourcing its waste service and being one of the first councils to transfer its housing stock in 1994 creating the reserves which generate the council's revenue budget for service improvements.
- 53 Partnership working is well established in most parts of the council. The council participates in over 27 strategic and community based partnerships and these cover a wide variety of issues and help provide support and funding, for example, the Wychavon and Redditch Rural Transport partnership. However, the council has recognised that not all partnerships have explicit outcomes that tie in with its key priorities. Where a partnership has been identified as not effective there is no detailed exit strategy yet and it is not clear whether the council will shift resources to ensure the partnership develops or withdraw from it.
- 54 Partnership working in addressing housing related issues at an operational level is well developed. For example, the council works well with the Housing and Police Liaison Group in addressing issues within the community in a sensitive and practical manner.
- 55 The overview function is effective through the task and finish group approach. A good example of this has been the new hospital development at Pershore civic centre site which was in response to proposed closure of the local hospital.

Overview developed a new option to build and finance a joint hospital and health centre which was strongly supported by the community. Overview and Scrutiny has started to review performance indicators and the committee has a developing awareness of the significance of this information

- 56 A key area of weakness is the challenge function in scrutiny. There is unstructured debate and lack of focus on issues brought before scrutiny. Despite the council implementing a Councillor development programme, take up of courses and opportunities has been disappointing, with only 40 per cent of Councillors attending training. This has resulted in a missed opportunity for Councillors to develop and enhance skills.

## Performance management

- 57 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in performance management.
- 58 The performance management framework has been developed to support the council's P and Ps. The system has simplified the number of performance indicators reported to Councillors and senior officers which ensures key priorities and poor performing areas are being regularly monitored.
- 59 Individual executive Councillors and senior managers have responsibility for the performance of key promises and this ensures accountability for service delivery. The information provided by the performance framework is clear and concise which means that the SMT and Executive Board can effectively manage general performance of the council and also any areas that are under performing through its regular meetings, for example where planning was poorly performing resources were redirected to this service areas as outlined in paragraph 39.
- 60 The council uses complaint monitoring to identify weak areas of service. The complaints monitoring system is used to identify problems especially in public facing service delivery, and trend analysis is used to spot problems and resolve them before they impact on quality of service e.g. a new collection service for bulky items has been introduced to reduce the amount of fly-tipping. Customer complaints are reported regularly at SMT and to members.
- 61 The council has a performance management framework which links ambitions to priorities and promises, which cascade down to service improvement plans and individuals through staff appraisals. Service plans are presented in a consistent format across all council services making it easier to make comparisons and identify any omissions, although quality is variable. For example, the Legal Services Service Plan does not contain quantifiable targets making monitoring difficult. Performance indicators that show performance not improving or stagnant are addressed by the council and corrective action is taken, for example, those PIs related to the planning service are now reflecting performance equal to the best councils.
- 62 Measurement of value for money is systematically undertaken. The external auditor states that financial performance of the council is strong. The council has good performance management of its finances, capital and assets. It prides itself on balancing its budget and keeping expenditure low. Councillors receive information on budget outturn and have regular financial monitoring reports which

assist in focusing on achieving value of money across the range of council services.

- 63 Risk management is still developing within the council. A risk management strategy has been produced and the council is currently identifying risks in order to produce a risk register. KPMG, the council's external auditor confirms this view. Heads of Service have started to identify risks within their service plans but there are no actions identified to minimise these.
- 64 The council's approach to performance management is consistent. However, some scrutiny councillors do not have a full understanding of performance management, and also have problems interpreting information. At a service level, housing department systems are new and not yet fully embedded. Despite this, the council is still managing its performance overall.
- 65 The council has corporate service standards which are not well known to the public. These means that members of the public are not always aware of the standard of service to expect from the council, e.g. telephone calls answered in four rings.

## **What has the council achieved / not achieved to date?**

### **Achievement in quality of service**

- 66 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in achievement in quality of service
- 67 The council achieves high quality in the delivery of most of its services. This good performance is reflected in the level of overall satisfaction with council services, which is 71 per cent. This is above average and almost equal to the top 25 per cent of councils. It is also better than the predicted performance, when levels of deprivation are taken into account. Parish surveys concluded that communities recognise that the council, overall, delivers a good standard of service and express high levels of satisfaction with the services they receive, e.g. 59 per cent felt the council responds quickly to complaints.
- 68 The comparative performance of the council, as measured by national performance indicators, is above average. The 2002/03 figures for national Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) – the most recent available for comparative performance – showed that 73 per cent of the council's BVPIs were above average. Forty-five per cent were in the top quartile while only 11 per cent were in the bottom quartile. Performance was particularly strong in planning and housing benefit, where most BVPIs were well above average, however it was weaker in housing where some key indicators, such as private unfit dwellings made fit or demolished were in the bottom quartile in 2001/02 and was 'qualified'<sup>2</sup> in 2002/03.
- 69 The council measures itself against its key priorities and has shown that the general trend of service quality is good, including:

<sup>2</sup> 'Qualified' means that the data was unsound and could not be authorised by the auditor.

### **A well managed council**

- 70 The council is particularly well managed and performance is strong for this priority. This is clear from satisfaction levels, for example, a recent MORI residents' survey shows a high satisfaction levels for most services and customer satisfaction levels with the one stop shops are 96 per cent. It is also clear from external accreditation, for example, QUEST, ISO 9001 for building consultancy and environmental health, Chartermark for Benefits Service and Revenues and One Stop Shops and Community Legal Services Quality Award. The council also has high staff sickness levels owing to several cases of long term illness.
- 71 Effective management has resulted in good performance and clear benefits for users, for example:
- ◆ The commitment made by the council to keep council tax increases to a maximum of 2.5 per cent has been consistent and achieved over the last three years. Collection of council tax is equal to the best performing councils.
  - ◆ One hundred per cent of housing benefits are correctly processed and within time.
  - ◆ The council is providing most public space services efficiently, and with high satisfaction levels.
- 72 The Benefits Fraud Inspectorate found the council is providing a fair towards good service because the service is clearly linked to corporate P and Ps. This is an important service for local people that the council has managed well, a fact that is reflected in its good performance and user satisfaction.
- 73 Best value inspections in Information Technology and Building Control indicate mixed performance with service scores of good and fair respectively. Information Technology was good because the council are effectively using IT to deliver services locally through the three one stop shops. This continues to be the case. Building Control was fair because there was a lack of performance management information about the service and little written information available to the public. There are however noticeable improvements in these aspects

### **A healthy and safe environment**

- 74 The council has made significant achievements and performs well in line with this priority. This has resulted in quality services which have clear benefits to local people and to users, for example, streets and public spaces are clean and attractive with public satisfaction levels amongst the best.
- 75 The council is delivering on objectives in the community plan which relate to 'A healthy and safe environment'. These have benefited users and improved the local environment. Examples include:
- ◆ The rolled out kerb side recycling collections to 93 per cent of households achieving recycling levels equal to the statutory target and reducing the environmental impact of waste.
  - ◆ The introduction of two new neighbourhood wardens and a beat manager, have resulted in reduced crime levels locally and added reassurance about the fear of crime.

- ◆ The Droitwich skate park has opened and £28,000 grants to eight organisations have provided play areas, which provide facilities for young people in line with their needs.

76 Several aspects of services provide by the council have above average performance when compared nationally, for example, Planning, Street Cleanliness and Crime levels. The council is in top quartile for street cleansing with 75 per cent with customers satisfied with the service. Crime levels in Wychavon are low with seven out of eight PIs with above average performance and five out of eight PIs being in the top quartile. The council's has local targets to reduce domestic burglary and vehicle crime, latest PI information shows that the council is achieving this. The refuse collection service is valued by local people with 90 per cent of people satisfied with the service. However, this type of service delivery does not encourage waste minimisation. Wychavon collects comparatively more rubbish per household than similar district councils with no restriction on the amount of household waste it will take away.

### **A prosperous economy**

77 The council has mixed performance in relation to this priority. It has made a significant contribution to increase the prosperity of the local economy. Examples include:

- ◆ £37,700 has been invested in seven retail and post office initiatives to keep village shops/post offices open, for the benefit of local residents The council has also awarded 57 small business start up grants and seven grants to established businesses during 2002/03 to boost the local economy.
- ◆ Nine regeneration projects have been delivered, including Abbey Park, Riverbank, Waterside, HAVEN, Riverside lightning and market place in Evesham. This has enhanced the local area making it more attractive to encourage businesses to locate in the district.
- ◆ The council has provided Walkway - IT centre, number eight – a theatre and a retail website in Pershore.

78 The council is using planning legislation to provide some affordable homes, for example, the Hadzor Hall development of 71 dwellings will include nine affordable homes - three shared equity and six for social rent, and the former Worcestershire Hotel development of 96 luxury flats will include 16 affordable units. However, this is not significantly meeting the needs of the community and is below their own target of 30 per cent affordable homes per development.

79 Performance in housing is poor. For example, one of the main indicators for housing (homelessness) is in the bottom quartile and there is a shortage of social and affordable homes. The situation is compounded by the demand placed on housing by people wishing to relocate to the area.

### **Achievement of improvement**

80 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in achievement of improvement.

81 The council has achieved significant improvement in service performance. This is clearly reflected in trends in national performance indicators. In 2002/03, the last

year for which audited figures are available, 64 per cent of the councils BVPIs improved compared to the previous year while, only 36 per cent declined or remained unchanged. This represents strong progress as many services were already performing well and improvement is therefore more challenging to achieve.

### **A well managed council**

- 82 The council has achieved improved performance for this priority. There are examples of improvements in the management of the council which have resulted in benefits for users and local people.
- 83 Best Value Inspections in Building Control and Information Technology had promising prospects for improvement because the council had invested both human and financial resources to improve service delivery. These have led to improvements for users, by the provision of better quality information and a higher standard of service.
- 84 The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate has assessed the council's proven track record to improve as fair to good because there is a commitment from Councillors and senior officers to improve services and a willingness to change where necessary.
- 85 The planning PIs have shown the greatest improvement. The performance of the council's planning service is much improved having moved from bottom quartile in 2001/02 in top quartile in 2002/03. In 2002, Wychavon was recognised as the most improved planning authority in England. The 2002/03 performance indicators show that response times for searches, (100 per cent in 10 days) and applications (83 per cent in eight weeks), departures from the local plan (0.1 per cent in 2001/02), and score against best practice (78 per cent), are equal to the best 25 per cent of councils.

### **A healthy and safe environment**

- 86 There is mixed performance in this priority area. There have been some improvements in areas which are important to local people. For example crime is an important issue for residents in Wychavon and crime levels in the district are already low - most performance indicators are equal to the lowest rates in the country and have improved in 2002/03 in relation to the previous year. The community safety partnership has achieved its targets in the community safety strategy through the introduction of neighbourhood wardens, extra CCTV cameras and a local beat manager. Early statistics show that these initiatives are reducing crime.
- 87 Recycling levels have also improved due to initiatives reflected in the council's priorities. A mobile scheme for recycling in remote rural areas funded by DEFRA and extra bring recycling centres have helped improve recycling rates.
- 88 Close working with the police has improved the time taken to remove abandoned vehicles from 14 days to 7 days. This is an important issue for local people who value the quality of the local environment.

### **A prosperous economy**

- 89 Performance improvement is mixed in this area. There have been a number of projects over the past three years which have enhanced the environment and economy of the town centres and more are planned. These include:
- ◆ Improvements to parks in Evesham using £130,000 of external funding from Advantage West Midlands.
  - ◆ Providing flood alleviation schemes in response to public concern.
  - ◆ A leisure centre in Pershore.
- 90 The council has historically had a good track record in supporting the development of new dwellings but it is not making sufficient progress in satisfying housing need. The target of providing 120 affordable homes in 2003 - 04, for example, will not be achieved. It is estimated that only 61 homes will be completed. Further, the section 106 developments have not yet met the 30 per cent threshold target; most new developments produce approximately 12 per cent affordable homes.
- 91 Improvement in housing performance is variable. The council's performance in the period 2002 -03 on homeless households in hostel accommodation is good when compared with other councils. However, the average number of weeks spent by homeless households in priority need in bed and breakfast is poor, below the bottom quartile average and getting worse.

### **Investment**

- 92 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in investment.
- 93 The council has put some building blocks in place which will contribute directly to service improvement. These include effective partnership working, community engagement, e-government, human resource practices and successful funding bids. These building blocks have already resulted in some changes for local people, for example, one stop shops. However, the council still needs to focus on strengthening its approach to risk management and ensuring that capacity in scrutiny is fully developed.
- 94 Council investments are in line with their priorities and promises. The council has invested in a programme of capital spending both directly and by securing grants from other agencies. For example, it has secured external funding of a planning delivery grant £254,000, one of the highest in the country, and £1million of market town funding into Evesham and Pershore to help regenerate the towns and surrounding rural areas.
- 95 The 'Our People Plan' has been produced to ensure that the council has the necessary staff and resources to deliver service improvements. The council has undertaken a pre Investors in People (IIP) assessment which has shown areas of improvement which will lead to successful re-accreditation in the summer. Corporate health indicators, for example, staff turnover and early retirements are all improving and the staff survey produced positive results with 85 per cent of staff enjoying their job.

- 96 Strategic capacity is being developed at a senior and middle management level. The council has invested £11,000 in middle managers (which includes two SMT officers) in a development programme which will equip managers with the necessary skills to make strategic decisions and address more cross cutting issues. The council has also invested in the MD designate by providing mentoring through SOLACE.
- 97 The council has invested £10,000 to improve their performance management system. Consilium, an IT partner has created a system to bring together the council's performance information, projects and plans. It will also be used to manage the risk register so the council can formalise this process in service plans. This will result in up to date easily accessible information to track council business.
- 98 The council has invested in poor performing services, e.g. at an operational level in housing. A new head of service was appointed in March 2003 and an additional four members of staff have been appointed. The new staff will support the restructured department in addressing housing issues. For example, one appointment is for an Empty Homes Officer who will support the policy development on improving the council's approach to identifying and reclaiming empty homes for the district.
- 99 The council has a sound financial platform to make improvements in priority areas. The council has a Medium Term Financial Plan in place for the next five years which covers investment and income projections, resource projections, assumptions on income and expenditure, financial risk assessment, and links to the capital strategy and asset management plan.
- 100 The council does have a track record of opening itself up and responding to internal and external challenge. It has invested resources to become a CPA pathfinder and ODPM pathfinder in partnership with the Worcestershire Hub group. Following the pathfinder inspection for CPA in October 2002, the council has addressed all the recommendations made following this process. It has allocated resources where required and put new practices and strategies into place to improve itself corporately, for example, in performance management. The council also acknowledged the value of having a peer assessment to help them focus on improvement and as such volunteered to have a further peer challenge as part of the re-inspection process.
- 101 However, the council has not invested in the housing service at a strategic level. For example, the council has not seriously and effectively engaged main stakeholders and partners in the development of housing strategies preferring to consult once the strategy has been developed internally. There are also no plans to change their current approach to consultation. Partners believe that their ability to influence strategy is very limited. The Government Office also reported that there was no evidence to show how resident and stakeholder consultation informed strategy.
- 102 There is as yet no consistent approach to risk management across the services, although the council has been investing in this area. Service plans for 2003/04 include sections on identifying risk but do not take the further step of considering actions to minimise risks once they have been identified. The risk register is still being developed. As a result, the council has still to identify how risks will be dealt with and minimised and how this will be incorporated into future service planning.

- 103 The council does not have plans to invest further in councillor capacity or to deal with low attendance at training events. Take up of its comprehensive councillor development programme was limited but the council has not explored the reasons for this or developed an alternative approach. This is hampering progress in developing an effective scrutiny function.

## **In the light of what the council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?**

### **Learning**

- 104 Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses in learning.
- 105 The council has a good level of self awareness about its successes and what remains to be achieved, for example, following the CPA pathfinder inspection the council has addressed all of the Audit Commission's recommendations and shared its learning with other councils.
- 106 The council has proactively engaged with other councils and stakeholders to improve service delivery, for example, the council has responded to Government Office and BFI recommendations and as a result they have received positive reports this year.
- 107 The council also actively learns from customer feedback and has made changes in the light of this to its services, for example, blue grab rails have been installed in disabled toilets to help people that are visually impaired because customers asked for them.
- 108 The council proactively seeks out learning from other councils and the private sector. There have been visits to Rolls Royce to identify new developments on effective team working and visits to Birmingham City Council and SITEL to identify and apply areas of good practice in developing local call centres.
- 109 The council has a track record for proactive learning through experience. It has learned from the experiences of planning and housing not to let services fail before they invest in them. The council has managed to turn around the performance of its planning service so that it is now recognised as a beacon for other rural districts.
- 110 The council has an open leadership and management style that positively promotes the active exchange of ideas of information. This is achieved through regular internal communications and keeping staff up to date with current initiatives. Both Councillors and staff are given the opportunity to contribute and challenge these initiatives through council wide briefings.
- 111 The council has started to actively share training and development learning across all services through the staff learning development group. Some departments share course/training notes to get wider benefits within teams. For example, Building Control has shared work on ISO 9001 to help middle managers with their work on achieving Charter Mark.

- 112 The council also has a track record for joint working with neighbouring councils to share ideas and benchmark current service delivery. An example of this is the Worcestershire Procurement forum that brings together districts and the county to share best practice and consider alternative methods of service delivery. For example, working in partnership with the county council, police and voluntary agencies to bring key services to the public through the one stop shop programme.

## Future plans

- 113 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in future plans.
- 114 The council has robust future plans and strategies including statutory plans. The plans contain clearly defined outcomes for the people of Wychavon. For example, the Human Resources Strategy (Our People Plan) sets out a sustained focus for achieving the council's priorities and promises to build capacity within the council and use staff more effectively and efficiently to deliver local services.
- 115 The council has made prudent financial assumptions for the next three years in order to create funding to drive improvement. Succession planning is in place to ensure capacity for future service delivery and the council is responding to previous weaknesses identified in the CPA pathfinder inspection, e.g. mainstreaming social inclusion in service plans and have revised the third council priority to include 'reaching out to everyone'.
- 116 The council has a robust Implementation of Electronic Government (IEG) Statement which covers all key areas of work for the council to 2005. Already the council is delivering on its objectives, a good example of this is its work in establishing the three one stop shops with other partners such as the police, county council and voluntary organisations. The council has also signed up to the Worcestershire Hub PSA target of providing 71 per cent of all of its services in an electronic form by 2005 and is well on the way to achieving this target. Wychavon DC has a dedicated team of staff working on the e-government agenda and clear targets are embedded in the Corporate Services Plan.
- 117 The council has completed an effective assessment of its current partnerships which will determine how it maximises the benefits of partnership working in the future. The assessment has identified which partnerships are providing most benefit to the council in enabling it to deliver on its Ps and Ps. It has also identified some partnerships which are not delivering maximum benefit. The council is currently determining which partnerships it will continue to develop and support through additional resources and those from which it will withdraw through a planned exit strategy.
- 118 The council has robust financial plans for the future. The council has developed a five year financial plan to support the five year strategy. This will build on the existing three year projections and plans and provide a more detailed projection of how the council will manage its future financial business.
- 119 The council is currently revising its local plan and this will be subject to a public enquiry starting in March 2004. The council has set aside the financial resources for this plan but are also planning the financial commitment required for the next

local plan following the government's planning reform agenda which needs to be in place by 2007.

- 120 The council's 'Our People Plan' lays strong foundations to cover future capacity requirements. It has explicit targets for ensuring that the council has the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver its ambitious council agenda for example, information from staff appraisals is being fed back to the HR department so a skills matrix can be produced. This will ensure that the council is aware of its current capacity and if appropriate any skills gaps can be identified and supplemented through training and development.
- 121 Government Office has identified the council's capital strategy and asset management plan as good. The local plan process was well managed and the council delivered in good time. However, the Government Office has assessed the council's Housing Strategy as 'average' but the strategy has not met the fit for purpose standard. The plans lack quantifiable targets and therefore it would be difficult to measure achievement in areas. There are too many actions that are related to continuing activities or are process driven as opposed to providing tangible outcomes.
- 122 Plans to address some areas of improvement such as long term waste management are still at an early stage of development. Difficult, important decisions related to investment have still to be made and the plans are still in early draft form. Plans for DDA compliance will not deliver by the 2004 deadline, but key public buildings will comply.
- 123 The risk assessment of service plans is at an early stage of development. Risks are identified but risk minimisation is not explicit. An independent risk assessment also identified that the council's 21 risk registers had yet to be co-ordinated corporately to manage common risks.

Summary of theme scores and strengths / weaknesses

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tangible, realistic and robust ambitions</li> <li>• Community leadership</li> <li>• Officer leadership</li> <li>• Council priorities understood by councillors and staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historically, no clear community leadership regarding housing</li> </ul>
Prioritisation	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priorities reflect council's ambitions</li> <li>• Effective use of consultation</li> <li>• Well communicated via council wide briefings, intranet and council magazine</li> <li>• Evidence of targeting resources from underspends of service budgets to meet priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council not identified local non-priorities</li> <li>• Limited evidence of moving resources from non-priority areas (mainly due to the strong financial position of the council)</li> <li>• Current housing strategy based on information that is out of date</li> <li>• Grant support for improvements in private sector housing not targeted</li> </ul>
Focus	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priorities revisited and refined annually</li> <li>• Ambitions focused on key priorities and what is important to local people</li> <li>• Ability to remain focused over time</li> <li>• Review used to maintain focus, e.g. self assessment of strategies</li> <li>• Council does not allow distractions to divert them from priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scrutiny function currently insufficiently focused on identifying and challenging poor performance</li> <li>• Council lost focus on major housing issues</li> </ul>
Capacity	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong Councillor and officer leadership</li> <li>• Effective officer and councillor relationships</li> <li>• Successful approach to procurement</li> <li>• Succession planning</li> <li>• Stable workforce</li> <li>• Partnerships well established</li> <li>• Effective overview function</li> <li>• Sound financial management practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of capacity for effective challenge in scrutiny</li> <li>• Under – utilised Councillor development programme</li> </ul>

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Performance management	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance management framework in place</li> <li>• Clear and concise performance information</li> <li>• Service plans presented in a consistent manner</li> <li>• Effective complaints monitoring</li> <li>• Staff appraisals</li> <li>• Strong financial performance – balanced budget and low expenditure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scrutiny Councillors do not have a full understanding of performance information</li> <li>• Effectiveness of risk management still being developed</li> <li>• Corporate service standards not well known to the public</li> </ul>
Achievement in quality of service	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High quality in delivery of most services</li> <li>• 73 per cent BVPIs above average</li> <li>• High levels of customer satisfaction (MORI)</li> <li>• BFI assessment – fair towards good</li> <li>• BV inspection for IT - good</li> <li>• Community plan objectives being delivered</li> <li>• Good performance in planning, street cleansing and crime</li> <li>• Significant contribution to regeneration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BV inspection for Building Control - fair</li> <li>• Waste minimisation is not effective</li> <li>• Poor performance in housing</li> </ul>
Achievement of improvement	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 64 per cent of BVPIs improved</li> <li>• Improvements linked to priorities, e.g. enhancing the town centres</li> <li>• BV inspections – given 'promising prospects' and improvement has resulted</li> <li>• BFI assessment – fair towards good</li> <li>• Planning performance has improved</li> <li>• Recycling levels have improved</li> <li>• Key projects have enhanced the environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some PIs still remain in bottom quartile, e.g. homelessness</li> <li>• No significant progress in satisfying housing need</li> </ul>

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Investment	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some building blocks in place</li> <li>• External funding secured</li> <li>• 'Our People' plan</li> <li>• Senior and middle manager development programme</li> <li>• Investment to improve performance management system</li> <li>• Investing in poor performing areas</li> <li>• Medium term financial plan</li> <li>• Effective use of external challenge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No investment in housing at a strategic level</li> <li>• No consistent approach to risk management</li> <li>• No further plans to invest in Councillor capacity or deal with low attendance at training events</li> </ul>
Learning	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good self-awareness</li> <li>• Actively responds to external feedback, e.g. GOWM and BFI</li> <li>• Responds to customer feedback</li> <li>• Proactively learns through experience, e.g. housing</li> <li>• Open leadership and management style</li> <li>• Staff learning development group</li> <li>• Joint working with neighbouring council</li> </ul>	
Future plans	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five year financial plan</li> <li>• Robust IEG statement</li> <li>• Government office states the council has good plans</li> <li>• Comprehensive homelessness strategy</li> <li>• Proactive approach to risk management</li> <li>• 'Our People' plan</li> <li>• Revising local plan</li> <li>• Partnership evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waste plan at early stage of development</li> <li>• Service plans are not fully risk assessed</li> </ul>

**Scoring key:**

- 1 - Weak
- 2 - Weaknesses outweigh strengths
- 3 - Strengths outweigh weaknesses
- 4 - Strong

## **Appendix 1 - Balancing housing markets (BHM) diagnostic assessment**

### **How well does the council understand its housing market and from its understanding has the council developed the right proposals to help balance its housing markets?**

- 124 The council has a basic understanding of its local housing market and the main elements are integrated into its key housing strategies and the local plan. However, information needs to be updated and plans require more development to support effective service delivery. Consequently, this is an area where there is a high risk of service failure.

#### **The research base**

- 125 The council commissioned Fordham Research Company, a professional housing research organisation, to conduct its main housing needs survey providing the core data for the council's housing strategy. The last survey was carried out in 2001 and a similar survey was conducted in 1996. The council also utilised a corporate MORI survey to inform the housing strategy.
- 126 In June 2002 the council conducted an Urban Capacity Study, extensive research into potential sites for new developments in predominantly urban areas. The study revealed that it was possible to develop 741 new dwellings in a sustainable manner as well as maintaining the environment of the district.
- 127 The council has established a reasonable data base of the main energy conservation issues and effectively uses this information to inform service delivery. The council employs a range of research techniques including, for example, postal questionnaires; the council's magazine (TWM) that is delivered to all households; through the Care and Repair Service; and accesses further information through partners such as the Energy Action Grants Agency.
- 128 The homeless review was reasonably informed but the council acknowledged that 'further work is required to capture the necessary information in a more comprehensive way'. However, a thorough and practical homelessness strategy was developed.
- 129 The last private sector house conditions survey was carried out in 1994. This survey revealed that of 36,424 dwelling identified that 3,322 properties, 9.1 per cent of the total, were in poor condition. The last stock condition survey was conducted in 1994 and the council has recently commissioned a commercial research organisation to carry out new research that will be finalised in June 2004. However, new data was not available to inform current strategies.
- 130 No research has been conducted into Empty Homes and Wasted Space, and there is no evidence of research or information on BMEs<sup>3</sup>, key workers, or the traveller community. It is acknowledged that the council recently approved a social inclusion strategy but this has not yet been incorporated or embedded into

<sup>3</sup> Black and Minority Ethnic Population.

housing strategies. Further, there is also no substantial evidence that the council is working at a sub-regional level in order to provide a geographically wider assessment of the housing market and housing needs.

- 131 In July 2002 the council conducted a best value review of its housing service. However, the review lacked rigour and relevant external and partnership input in order to inform service delivery. Although the council has established some baseline data to inform its housing strategies there are areas where information is lacking or is out of date.

### **The development of plans and strategies**

- 132 The council's approach to developing its plans is variable. For example, it has developed a comprehensive homelessness strategy in consultation with the key stakeholders and has worked well with a wide range of partners in developing energy related initiatives.
- 133 However, it has not effectively engaged with its main partners and stakeholders in developing its key housing strategy. This is a significant weakness considering that the council transferred its housing stock to two main providers in 1994. The council consultation with its partners as part of the best value review was limited; a review which established the council's main improvement agenda for housing.
- 134 Further, the council does not fully engage with neighbouring councils to address or develop housing related strategies at a sub-regional level. It is acknowledged that the council participates in the county's Chief Planning and Housing Officers' Group; and although the group has started to consider working at a sub-regional level to address housing issues the approach is still developing and no clear strategy for the way forward has yet been established.

### **The plans**

- 135 The council has recently identified housing as a major priority and has developed a main housing strategy that is intended to address future housing need. In addition the council has produced a homelessness strategy and plans with clear targets and milestones to address local need as do the plans on energy conservation. The local plan is clear, involved extensive consultation, and provides strategies for the future that focus on protecting the environment and addressing the needs of the community; and includes some targets for housing.
- 136 However, although the council has developed a housing strategy the plans to progress the strategy are not well developed. The plans lack quantifiable targets and therefore it would be difficult to measure achievement in areas. Further, there are too many actions that are related to continuing activities or are process driven as opposed to providing tangible outcomes. The housing strategy does not meet the fit for purpose criteria and has been assessed by Government Office as average.
- 137 The council's service plan for housing is also not fully developed and although it does provide a target to develop an additional 120 affordable homes in the current financial year, overall it does not provide an adequate framework for service delivery. Further, a main action from the service plan is to implement the best value improvement plan; a plan that was developed from a poor review.

- 138 Where plans have been developed with clear outcome focused targets they have not been challenging. For example, the council's target to reduce the number of unfit properties is two per year and to bring two empty properties back into use per year. Given that there are 1,678 unfit private properties and 963 empty properties the targets, if achieved, will not make a significant impact.
- 139 The council's future plans for housing are under developed and do not provide an adequate framework for service delivery. Too many actions are internally focused on process issues and the tangible outcomes for the community are limited. Although the council is in the process of establishing positive foundations for the housing service it has not developed an appropriate strategy with clear quantifiable outcomes for housing in the district of Wychavon.

### **What are the council's actions and what outcomes has it achieved in helping to balance housing markets?**

- 140 The council has knowledgeable and competent staff who, at an operational level, work well with partners. However, the council has not yet established effective working partnerships at a strategic or sub-regional level in balancing the local housing market. Consequently, this is an area which has a high risk of service failure.

### **Working together**

- 141 At an operational level the council works effectively with a wide range of partners in maximising its capacity to support service delivery in housing. For example, the council works well with the Housing and Police Liaison Group; a group that consists of the main housing associations, Police, and the council in providing practical measures to ensure the environment and individuals are protected in the community. The Group has developed over a period of several years and the shared local knowledge is making a valuable contribution to the district and to the council achieving its corporate objectives.
- 142 The council also works in partnership with seven housing associations under the Wychavon Housing Consortium to manage the Common Housing Register; the district's main social housing waiting list. This allows an individual to make just one application for social housing, as opposed to seven, which is then processed through the consortium.
- 143 Internally the housing department has restructured to provide more cohesive service delivery and has also recently developed a closer working relationship with the planning department. To support this, a Senior Planning Officer has been seconded to Housing Services to improve co-ordination.
- 144 The council does not engage in a meaningful manner with partners at a strategic level or at a sub-regional level. The lack of effective partnerships at a strategic level impacts on the council's ability to influence within the district and sub-regionally. The council does, however, acknowledge that better partnership working with neighbouring councils needs to be developed.
- 145 Following the LSVT of its housing stock in 1994 the council acknowledged that it did not see housing as a main priority or a high agenda activity and therefore did not provide a clear leadership role in supporting and facilitating the housing

needs of the community. Although the emphasis has recently changed the new leadership role of the council in this area has not yet been established.

### Use of resources

- 146 There is clear evidence that the council has put in building blocks in an attempt to develop a more effective housing department. The department has recently restructured and internal communications and co-ordination are much improved. Staff are competent and knowledgeable and maximise their abilities through access to a wide range of learning and development opportunities. The new structure has also established a positive management team with strong Councillor support and leadership. The council has also invested in staff capacity and is in the process of recruiting four new people to the housing team.
- 147 The housing department has also invested in new IT systems to support service delivery. For example, the Common Housing Register is now fully computerised enabling the council to respond in writing to applicants within seven days providing details of status on the register. And currently there are no backlogs.
- 148 The council does not target grant support for improvements in private sector housing. The council has recently approved a Housing Grants and Renewal Policy with eligibility criteria but it is not known how this will be promoted or targeted to meet the greatest need. The council's grant allocation for 2002/03 was under spent by approximately a third, a loss of important resources that could have benefited the community.

### Impact on the ground

- 149 Since the council transferred its housing stock in 1994 approximately 828 new affordable housing units have been developed in the period October 1994 to March 2002 through the LASHG.<sup>4</sup> The council's target is to provide 1,000 affordable homes by 2004 and ideally 1,300 'should planning constraints and development opportunities allow'.
- 150 There is clear evidence to show that the council has used and is using planning legislation, section 106 agreements, to provide some affordable homes. For example, the Hanbury Road development in Droitwich of 134 dwellings will include 15 affordable homes. The Hadzor Hall development of 71 dwellings will include 9 affordable homes - 3 shared equity and 6 for social rent; and the former Worcestershire Hotel development of 96 luxury flats will include 16 affordable units - 12 for shared ownership and 4 for social rent.
- 151 The housing needs survey conducted in 2000 concluded that there was a projected need to the year 2005 of 5,151 households. Given that part of the need could be met by repairs, adaptations, and some transfers for social housing tenants the council estimates that 2,400 affordable homes will be required by 2005. The council states, under its latest Supplementary Planning Guide, that it will employ Section 106 agreements to ensure that, on appropriate sites, 30 per cent of new dwellings will be designated affordable.

<sup>4</sup> Local Authority Social Housing Grant.

- 152 However, although the council has historically had a good track record in supporting the development of new dwellings it is not making sufficient progress in satisfying housing need. The target of providing 120 affordable homes in 2003-04, for example, will not be achieved. It is estimated that only 61 homes will be completed. Further, the section 106 developments have not yet met the 30 per cent threshold target, most new developments produce approximately 12 per cent affordable homes.
- 153 The council has recently established, through Scrutiny and Review, a group of Councillors to consider how to provide affordable homes for the future but there is not yet a strategy in place and plans have still to be developed. It is a concern of the Government Office that it is not known how the council will meet the challenge of providing affordable homes for the community.
- 154 With reference to the key performance indicators in housing (BVPIs<sup>5</sup>), the council's performance in the period 2002 - 03 is variable. For example, the council's performance on the average weeks by homeless households in hostel accommodation is good when compared with other councils. However, the average number of weeks spent by homeless households in priority need in bed and breakfast accommodation was poor and in the bottom quartile. The best performers in this category accommodated people for one week and the average for the worst was nine weeks; Wychavon's average was ten weeks. In addition, the council's performance on private unfit dwellings made fit or demolished were in the bottom quartile in 2001/02 and qualified in 2002/03.

**How well does the council monitor its progress and impact in helping to balance housing markets and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?**

- 155 This is an area where there is a high risk of service failure.
- 156 The council has established procedures in place to effectively monitor the Local Plan that conforms with the county structure plan. The council also has good performance management arrangements in place that enables it to effectively monitor progress of its implementation of HECA 1995. In addition, the council has invested in new IT software to enable better monitoring of, for example, grants and homelessness.
- 157 The council acknowledged in its self-assessment that it needed to improve its approach to performance management in housing and has started to address this area. However, some systems are new and still to be embedded and the focus at this stage is on micro issues as opposed to a wider perspective and a detailed understanding of district and sub-regional needs. For example, the Government Office was very critical of the council's lack of ability to monitor the financial elements of housing related to spend against objectives and targets. The report stated, 'wholly inadequate information was provided'
- 158 Further, the quality of information is variable, inconsistent and not co-ordinated. For example, it was not possible to determine the exact number of social and

<sup>5</sup> BVPI - Best Value Performance Indicators.

affordable houses built. Information was provided but was confusing and contradicted other statistics presented.

- 159 In order for a performance management framework to be effective it is essential that plans are well developed. The council's housing strategy and related housing plans are, in the main, poor; they are underdeveloped, lacking clear quantifiable targets that would enable the council to achieve its corporate priorities and do not provide an effective means by which to manage or monitor performance. Without a clear strategy it is difficult to confirm direction and monitoring arrangements.
- 160 The council proactively seeks out learning from other councils and organisations and has used this to drive improvements. For example, it is introducing a new approach to housing the homeless with rent arrears based on an innovative project in another council; and has also improved the provision of grants for the disabled based on best practice from another council. The Government Office praised the council for a range of creative initiatives such as the promotion of detection equipment for people at risk of falling in their homes.
- 161 However, there is no evidence to show how the council is learning how to address housing needs at a strategic level. The council has established, through Overview and Scrutiny, a group to consider how to provide affordable housing in the district but this at an early stage. There is also no information on how the council will engage with partners to support this process; a point raised by Government Office. Further, although eight Councillors have nominated positions on housing association boards there is no evidence to show how their experiences and knowledge are captured to inform the housing strategies or service delivery.
- 162 The council acknowledge that the housing department has had difficulties and was not making the positive contribution to achieving corporate priorities and addressing housing needs, especially at a strategic level. The council is now in the process of re-establishing its approach to balancing the housing market and putting building blocks in place but there is a still a considerable amount of work to do. The council has not yet established, at a strategic level with partners, a comprehensive housing strategy with clear and challenging targets to address the future of housing need in Wychavon.

## Summary of balancing housing markets diagnostic judgements and strengths / weaknesses

Area of focus	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
How well does the council understand its housing market and from its understanding has the council developed the right proposals to help balance its housing markets?	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reasonable housing needs survey and urban study</li> <li>Clear homelessness strategy and plans</li> <li>Clear Local Plan - well consulted - supporting corporate priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private sector research out of date</li> <li>Limited partner involvement in developing strategies and plans at a strategic level</li> <li>Poor housing BVR</li> <li>Ineffective housing strategy</li> <li>Poor service plan - not outcome focused</li> <li>Housing targets are not challenging</li> </ul>
What are the council's actions and what outcomes has it achieved in helping to balance housing markets?	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good partnership working at an operational level</li> <li>Restructured dept and improved internal communication co-ordination</li> <li>New IT systems to support service delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Few outcome focused targets</li> <li>Limited partnership working at a strategic and sub-regional level</li> <li>Not using s106 agreements to threshold limits</li> <li>PIs for unfit dwellings and returning per cent private dwellings vacant qualified</li> <li>Not on target to minimise b and b accommodation by 2004</li> </ul>
How does the council monitor its progress and impact in helping to balance housing markets and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Plan links with County Structure Plan monitoring arrangements</li> <li>Effective monitoring of HECA 1995</li> <li>Investment in IT software to improve monitoring of, e.g. grants and homelessness</li> <li>Council open and responsive to learning from other councils</li> <li>Responded well to Pathfinder review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No clear, outcome focused strategy to work to</li> <li>Poor plans do not provide for effective monitoring arrangements</li> <li>Monitoring is mixed and quality of information is variable</li> <li>Limited learning at a strategic level</li> <li>Councillors on housing association boards do not use experience to develop housing strategies</li> </ul>
<b>Balancing housing markets diagnostic assessment judgement</b>	<b>C</b>		

### Scoring key

For each of the key areas looked at within the diagnostic assessments **the need for improvement**, based upon the risk of service failure and poor outcomes, is identified using the following scale.

- a = very low
- b = low
- c = high
- d = very high

## Appendix 2 - Public space diagnostic assessment

### How well does the council contribute to the management of the physical environment?

- 163 This is an area where the risk of service failure is low.
- 164 Wychavon is a mix of small towns, villages and countryside, much of which is agricultural. It is an attractive area which is highly valued by local people. This is reflected in above average resident's satisfaction levels. The 2001 MORI survey identified that 89 per cent of residents are satisfied with Wychavon as a place to live.
- 165 The council is effective in securing a high quality environment. Management of the physical environment and balancing social, economic and environmental factors are important issues for the residents of Wychavon and for the council. The council gained this clear message from the community plan consultation.
- 166 The council has clear ambitions and priorities for the environment. This is reflected in the community plan, which has an overall aim to *'improve the quality of life for everyone'*. Two of the 5 themes in the plan also support this. They are to:
- ◆ make the environment even better; and
  - ◆ build vibrant communities.

There are promises in the community plan to achieve these objectives. These include providing new play areas, flood alleviation schemes, to designate 3 Nature Reserves, develop two community renewable energy schemes and more town centre enhancements.

- 167 The council is clear about the problems and opportunities related to managing the physical environment and has plans to make improvements. It is aware of its important role in stewardship and provides effective leadership. The council has arrangements in place to identify and tackle problems and capitalise on opportunities:
- ◆ The three Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) are based on the three centres of population, which are Droitwich, Evesham and Pershore. These maintain a local focus and provide a network of alliances to address problems and make improvements at a community level.
  - ◆ Comprehensive resident surveys of the three main towns and surrounding areas have been carried out. These have identified local issues and priorities related to social, economic and environmental factors and LSP's are now using local council funding to address these.
  - ◆ Local plan consultation was commended by the government for its innovative approach to engaging people in development issues. This provided district-wide information about environmental, social and economic issues that are

important to local people. This information has been used to develop the local plan in line with local needs and views.

- ◆ Regular joint inspections of environment services by the council and its contractors highlight areas for improvement. This ensures that services such as grounds maintenance and street cleansing are effective and react quickly to problems.

- 168 The council is clear about what works best in Wychavon. A three town approach to issues related to the physical environment is more effective in Wychavon, than a district wide approach because residents generally relate well to this localised focus. There are development plans in place to make improvements which are important to local people and which are prioritised by the council and in line with its corporate Ps and Ps.
- 169 The council is clear about how best to deliver improvements to the local environment and how to secure the necessary resources. The Market Town programme, for Evesham and Pershore and the canals project in Droitwich have established structures to debate local issues and produced prioritised action that are comprehensive. The Market Towns funding from Advantage West Midlands ends in 2004 in Evesham and 2005 in Pershore. The council already has a track record of attracting, funding and further short term funding streams are in place for these programmes but the sustainability of external funding is uncertain.
- 170 The council is committed to providing access for the disabled to all its public building and is starting to meet its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act. But not all the council's public buildings will be fully compliant by the 2004 deadline. The 2002/03 best value performance indicator recorded that only 27 per cent of council buildings had facilities for the disabled. This is below median. Since then, an audit of all council buildings has been undertaken and not major issues have been highlighted. Plans and funding are in place to ensure that all the key building will be compliant by October 2004. This objective is reflected in a promise made in the community plan. The compliance of other council buildings will be addressed over the next 3 years in routine maintenance programmes.
- 171 The council ensures that local planning policy, practices and control contribute strongly to the quality of the environment. The Local Plan, planning policies and clear guidance provide the council with a comprehensive framework for the development of the district. These take a long term view and balance economic, social and environmental considerations. Plans build on achievements of the past, for example by ensuring developers provide quality open space facilities for new developments by attracting extra resources through its planning policies and section 106 agreements, for example Waterside Gardens. Clear guidance is available to planners and requirements are in line with national planning guidance.
- 172 The performance of the council's planning service is much improved and most aspects are top performing. In 2002, Wychavon was recognised as the most improved planning authority in England. The 2002/03 performance indicators show that response times for searches, (100 per cent in 10 days) and applications (83 per cent in eight weeks), departures from the local plan (0.1 per cent in 2001/02), and score against best practice (78 per cent), are equal to the best 25 per cent of councils.

- 173 The council is effective in promoting and achieving quality in developments and has a strong track record in attracting inward investment to enhance the environment and improve the local economy and communities. A good example of this is improvements to parks in Evesham using £130,000 of external funding from Advantage West Midlands.
- 174 The council secures quality for the local environment through its own building and development programme and makes significant investments in its own buildings and open spaces. In the year 2002/03, £832,000 was spent on the contact centres, £665,000 on parks, £639,000 on car parks, and £465,000 on public toilets. Public feedback, satisfaction levels and external awards such as those for the public toilets, indicate that this investment has been effective.
- 175 The council ensures that the local environment is well maintained. There are planned maintenance programmes in place for parks and open spaces, and funding is available for ongoing improvements. The council has flexible incentive based working arrangements with contractors that encourage improvements, and has won national awards for its public toilets.
- 176 Council staff add value to the environment during their routine work. For example, those who operate in public areas are valued by residents as they add a sense of security, especially neighbourhood wardens and dog wardens. Other council staff contribute to the management of the local environment by observing standards and reporting problems when they are about their normal duties.
- 177 The council has effective systems in place to deal with pollution. The council is fully aware of its statutory responsibilities in relation to air and other pollution and has a policy and robust systems are in place to regularly monitor, assess and report air quality. Reviews of air quality in 2000 and 2003 concluded that the air quality in Wychavon is good, with no areas exceeding any of the statutory objectives. Therefore, no air quality management areas are necessary.
- 178 The council does not always act quickly to reported problems related to pollution, noise and other nuisances. The environmental health service has clear procedures and targets to deal with related problems. This service has ISO9001 accreditation and has adopted the Enforcement Concordat. Eighty-eight per cent of priority issues such as overflowing sewers and sounding alarms are responded to in two hours. The council has systems in place to help resolve neighbourhood nuisance issues. It supported the establishment of Mediation South Worcestershire, by providing start up funding and ongoing community grants and works closely with this agency. The council delivers awareness programmes related to nuisance problems and is prepared to take enforcement action in serious cases that cannot be resolved through negotiation. But the lack of a responsive out of hour's service limits the effectiveness of the service.
- 179 There are examples of how the council takes a broader view of environmental issues. Sustainability is a central theme of the community plan and the draft local plan and this is reflected in planning policies. The local plan identifies areas of flooding and the council has been proactive, responding to local concerns, by providing several flood alleviation schemes. The council has also adopted a travel plan and has delivered sustainability awareness training to staff and Councillors.

### **Does the council help keep the locality clean?**

- 180 There is a low risk of service failure in this area.
- 181 The council's street cleansing services are effective and relatively low cost. Streets and open spaces are generally clean, well swept and free from accumulations of litter. Public satisfaction with the service, when last measured for the Audit Commission PI in 2000, was equal to the best.
- 182 The council deals effectively with problems related to keeping the locality clean. It is aware of litter hotspots and joint monitoring arrangements with the contractor are effective, ensuring that these are dealt with promptly and high standards are maintained. Targets of cleanliness are set for all parts of the district. Contracts for cleansing services are incentive based and this encourages service improvements, and working arrangements with the contractor are constructive. Parish councils are encouraged to litter pick through bursary schemes. This has significantly contributed to the quality of the local environment.
- 183 Fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles are dealt with quickly and effectively. Fly-tipping on public land is removed by the council within 24 hours and that on private land is investigated and resources are identified to remove this, where feasible. The council liaises with private land owners to encourage these areas to be kept clean. Close working with the police has improved the time taken to remove abandoned vehicles from 14 days to the national standard of 7 days
- 184 The council is not fully proactive in relation to enforcement of contraventions related to fly-tipping, dog fouling and littering. But it does use powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1995, if littering on private land constitutes a statutory nuisance, and fixed penalty notices for dog fouling are issued.
- 185 The performance of the waste collection service is satisfactory. Satisfaction levels are equal to the best and better than predicted when taking into account levels of deprivation. Performance on missed bin collections, however, is below average.
- 186 The council's performance on waste management is improving. The service is important to residents, and the government has set challenging targets for recycling. The council's own data indicates that the 2003/04 statutory recycling target of 14 per cent will be achieved by the deadline of the end of this financial year. The 2002/03 BVPI records a recycling rate of 11 per cent which is close to achieving the council's 14 per cent target ( within 77 per cent of the target) - which is above median performance. The recycling waste collection service has only recently been rolled out to 93 per cent of households and even higher recycling rates will be recorded in the future as a result. There are other initiatives aimed at increasing recycling rates, such as, an extra seven bring recycling centres, and twenty new micro recycling sites, and a mobile scheme for recycling in remote rural areas, all funded by DEFRA.
- 187 The council has the potential to achieve the 2005/06 target of 21 per cent, but will have to work hard to encourage greater participation in the recycling collection. Plans to achieve this are viable and although still draft, several initiatives are in place, for example, awareness raising programmes. The council has a track record in encouraging public participation in waste management initiatives, for example, it has sold a large number of subsidised home compost bins to encourage minimisation.

- 188 The achievement of longer term waste management targets is currently uncertain. The supporting strategy and funding are not yet in place. The council firmly supports an integrated approach to the achievement of the long term targets for recycling, minimisation and diversion from landfill. It is working constructively with its neighbours to develop a policy and strategy with the objective of achieving a sustainable waste management system. This process has been delayed due to failure to secure planning approval for an essential facility, so a fresh options appraisal is necessary. Key principles and policies are approved by partners, but targets and strategy are yet to be determined.
- 189 The council's performance on waste minimisation is only fair. It currently does little to promote the waste hierarchy principles (minimize, re-use, recycle) to the trade waste collection service and household waste arising is higher than average at 416Kg per capita in 2002/03, but the latest data supplied by the council indicates that the increase last year at 2.5 per cent, was below the national average of 3 per cent. Green waste is currently land filled and not composted.
- 190 The council has mixed performance on minimisation, recycling and reuse through education and awareness raising. There are several initiatives in place to achieve this and added capacity is gained through adoption of county wide initiatives and programmes and through the levering in of external funding. This approach also ensures a consistent message and format are achieved, and quality products are delivered. This is a long term investment and the impact is difficult to assess.

#### **Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?**

- 191 Community safety is an area of low risk of failure.
- 192 Community safety and reducing the fear of crime is an important issue for residents in Wychavon. The council provides strong community leadership in this area and is clear about what are the main community safety issues in Wychavon. This has been determined through extensive consultation and is reflected in the Community Plan where community safety is the top priority out of five. There are clear links between the community plan and the community safety strategy. Promises in the former support objectives and action plans in the latter and the council has mechanisms in place, such as the crime action groups linked to each of the LSPs, to develop the community safety theme.
- 193 The second community safety strategy for the period 2002-05 and the annual action plans are effective in addressing and balance identified issues important to local people with national priorities and targets. They provide a clear vision for improving community safety in the district and build on the first strategy which ran from 1999 to 2002. The current strategy was determined by the crime audit and reflects the views of local people gained through comprehensive district wide consultation.
- 194 The council's own assessment judged the strategy to have below average effectiveness, with too many priorities and targets which could make it difficult for partners to maintain a focus on the key issues. This was recognised by the council and has been rationalised, by the adoption of annual action plans. These are effective and focus on a smaller number of priorities to be tackled in the current year by partners. For each priority action, the plan is clear about, which

lead agency is responsible, key tasks with milestones, how performance will be measured, timescales and outcomes.

- 195 The council can identify clear achievements from the first and from the current strategy. For example, the first strategy achieved the development of CCTV monitoring, secure car parks and the second is progressing well. Achievements and investments include drug awareness programmes and rural safety schemes.
- 196 The council acknowledges that the previous strategy and individual community safety initiatives have not been formally evaluated to gauge the real impact on the community. This is currently being addressed, for example, in relation to fear of crime. A survey is being conducted to establish the scale of this problem. This will provide a baseline to assess the impact of future initiatives.
- 197 The council is clear what issues to lead on and supports other partners in achieving objectives in the plan. This is reflected in the resources the council has contributed to the partnership such as funding two neighbourhood wardens, £40,000 funding for skate parks, CCTV cameras and monitoring arrangements and drugs awareness programmes for schools
- 198 The council is an active, committed and valued member of the community safety Partnership and makes a full contribution to improving community safety. This was the conclusion of a formal review of the partnership. It provides leadership, funding, administrative support and project management skills. The council's community safety co-ordinator, leads and delivers projects on behalf of the council, and supports and advises staff and Councillors on community safety issues. The council's commitment has helped to make the partnership effective in tackling community safety issues in Wychavon.
- 199 The council and its partners have successfully built additional capacity into the partnership through its amalgamation with those of Worcester and Malvern to form the South Worcestershire CDRP. These partners had already successfully pooled resources on specific projects and the move follows government advice. This is a recent move and will not be fully established until the joint priorities are embedded into a new joint strategy which will be developed for 2005.
- 200 The Wychavon partnership is successful in attracting external funding to support community safety projects. A good example of this is £80,000 from Communities Against Drugs for awareness programmes in all schools and in the community but it is still early days to determine the impact of this funding.
- 201 The council is effectively mainstreaming community safety issues into the planning and delivery of all its services. Reducing crime and the fear of crime have been prioritised in the community plan and four of the promises are addressing community safety issues. The council's community safety coordinator is providing training and advice to council staff to promote mainstreaming and a section 17 audit has been carried out There are several examples of how the council achieves mainstreaming, such as the establishment of an executive board Councillor for community safety and reports to Councillors highlight community safety implications.
- 202 Crime levels in Wychavon are low - most performance indicators are equal to the lowest rates in the country and have improved in 2002/03 in relation to the previous year. But the fear of crime is an issue important to local people. The

council through the community plan, and the partnership are jointly addressing this in a robust and effective way. As well as CCTV coverage and monitoring, other initiatives to tackle this include provision of two wardens and reassurance initiatives. Provisional data from the police indicated that crime levels have significantly reduced since the introduction of the wardens, although it is too early to judge if this is a sustained trend.

### **Does the council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?**

- 203 This is an area of low risk of service failure.
- 204 The council has a clear vision about the needs of young people and this has led to the provision of a wide range of activities to match identified needs. This is an important issue locally. A third of local residents surveyed in 2002 identified a good range of facilities for young people as a key quality of life priority.
- 205 The council effectively engages with young people. Examples include, the staging of 'party in the park' consultation events at each of the three main towns engaged a large number of young people, informal discussion groups in high schools and through sports and arts programs.
- 206 The council is successful in engaging with young people and providing for their needs. The LSPs play a vital part in the ongoing engagement of young people, understanding their needs and the delivery of suitable programmes and facilities. Each LSP has a sub group to address the issues related to young people. These comprise statutory and voluntary agencies and young people themselves.
- 207 But the council could do more. The internet is acknowledged as being vital to engagement with young people to identify need and evaluate the impact of strategies and projects. The council's web site is not effective in this respect but there are plans for improvement to maintain a continued dialogue with young people.
- 208 It is clear that the council's engagement with young people has influenced its, priority setting and this has led to the provision of facilities to meet the needs of young people. This is reflected in the community plan under the theme of 'vibrant communities'. This includes promises to create facilities and programmes for young people, for example, the provision of two skate parks, extra physical activity for 800 young people and rural transport schemes for young people. Plans and funding are in place, and are delivering on the ground, for example, one of the skateparks has been completed
- 209 Wider ownership of issues related to young people is being encouraged within the council and the LSP. This is being tackled in a pragmatic and structured way through funding and engagement with stakeholders. £21,000 funding has been given to the three LSPs to support this and the LSPs are providing a further £15,000 for dealing with young people issues. The council is establishing mechanisms to secure a range of activities and address issues. It has recently set up the Wychavon Youth Strategy Group which is chaired by a councillor and comprises a wide range of stakeholders. The focus is to encourage a wider ownership of youth issues and to develop a partnership approach to solutions.

- 210 The council is effective in securing a wide range of activities for young people to encourage their positive engagement. There are a wide and diverse range of facilities and activities for children and young people provided by the council itself; many are provided through the three leisure centres. But many more are secured through capacity building partnerships. Examples include, swimming, sports programmes and activities, 'Party in the park' events, parks and play areas, drama groups and music development projects.
- 211 The council is clear about which activities to provide itself and the value of partnerships and support for other groups to provide facilities. A small council team effectively delivers the council's own programme and works in partnership with other agencies and groups. This comprises a youth and sports development officer, an assistant, a project officer, an arts officer and 30 part time coaches.
- 212 The council adequately funds this function. A budget of over £200,000 is provided, but it uses capacity building partnerships effectively and most of the activities for young people are delivered this way. Partners include, Worcestershire County Council Youth Services, Arts Team and Libraries Service, Sports Colleges and Worcestershire All Sports Partnership.
- 213 The council ensures that partnerships are effective in providing activities that young people value. Partnerships are being monitored and evaluated. The focus is to ensure that they are effective in delivering benefits to local young people. The Worcestershire All Sports Partnership has a high impact, but the Wychavon Youth Sports Strategy Group currently has a low impact. This later group is being re-energised to make it more effective.
- 214 The council also successfully encourages other groups and agencies to provide activities and facilities. Financial grants are given to parish councils and local groups to develop and maintain rural play areas and other youth projects. The council also uses its knowledge and experience to help other groups gain external funding. For example, £133,000 from 'Awards for All' went to local groups last year as a result of the councils help.
- 215 The council evaluates projects to ensure they are meeting needs. This is done through consultation and through involving young people in the design of facilities, for example, the new skate park at Droitwich was designed by skate boarders, and redesigned following evaluation. The Active Sports programme is being externally evaluated by University College Worcester, and most programmes are evaluated by questionnaire. User feedback is used to improve service delivery, for example, activities at the leisure centres.
- 216 The council is proactive and successful in the promotion of activities for young people. This is achieved in a variety of ways, including leaflets, posters, presentations to schools and groups, the council's sports newsletter and through the media. Participation rates suggest that these methods are effective. Last year youth participation increased by 20 per cent as a result of 250 extra sessions being arranged by the council.
- 217 The council ensures that activities can be accessed easily and safety. Activities are arranged at a wide range of locations and venues including leisure centres, schools, community halls, libraries and parks. Price is not a barrier to participation as all events are low cost or free, and the council has concessionary rates for disadvantaged groups at its sports and leisure facilities. Public transport

in rural areas is a barrier to participation. A scrutiny committee is examining this problem and looking for solutions. Wychavon is also a leading player in the county's Public Service Agreement stretch target to increase the participation of young people from disadvantaged groups in physical activities. Provisional data supplied by the council is encouraging, indicating that 38 per cent more children in the target group have been involved in physical activity

- 218 The council does not deal consistently with child protection issues. Practices are well established in the leisure centres, in arts activities, in the youth and sport development unit, contractors and associated partnerships. There is effective joint working with key agencies and police checks of relevant staff and training sessions are carried out. Child protection procedures are not fully embedded throughout the whole council. A child protection policy has only recently been adopted by the council, and wider ownership of this and the associated procedures is still to be achieved.

### Summary of public space diagnostic assessment judgements and strengths / weaknesses

Area of focus	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
How well does the council contribute to the management of the physical environment?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attractive area, valued by residents</li> <li>• Priority area reflected in community plan</li> <li>• Key issues identified by Independent audit</li> <li>• Economic social and environmental issues balanced</li> <li>• Effective partnerships and external funding</li> <li>• Planning service top performing</li> <li>• Quality encouraged in development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will not be fully compliant with DDA by 2004</li> <li>• Procedures to deal with noise and pollution – but no out of hours service for speedy response</li> <li>• Long term funding for LSPs not determined</li> </ul>
Does the council help keep the locality clean?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streets and open spaces clean and free from litter– high levels of satisfaction</li> <li>• Effective contracts and joint monitoring</li> <li>• Speedy and effective clearing of fly tipping and abandoned vehicles</li> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> recycling target achieved</li> <li>• Waste collection service has high levels of satisfaction</li> <li>• Active partner in waste management partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer term plans and funding to achieve waste targets not yet in place</li> <li>• High mass of waste per household and collection methods do not encourage minimisation</li> <li>• Enforcement for litter, dog fouling, fly tipping etc is not fully effective</li> </ul>
Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low levels of crime</li> <li>• High level of council commitment - 1<sup>st</sup> priority of community plan</li> <li>• Strategy and action plan tackles national and local issues</li> <li>• Active committed and valued Community Safety partner</li> <li>• Effective partnerships and external funding</li> <li>• Council services are addressing crime &amp; disorder issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy not fully effective – too many priorities and outcomes unclear</li> <li>• No formal evaluation of previous strategy and individual initiatives</li> </ul>
Does the council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear about the needs of young people</li> <li>• Priority for the council</li> <li>• Effective engagement with young people with positive outcomes</li> <li>• Range of facilities and activities for young people</li> <li>• Council works in partnership and supports groups who provide activities for young people</li> <li>• Increased youth participation in sport and PSA target for disadvantaged young people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all partnerships are effective</li> <li>• Child protection practices in place but policy only recently adopted and limited ownership outside direct services</li> </ul>
<b>Public space diagnostic assessment judgement</b>	<b>B</b>		

**Scoring key**

For each of the key areas looked at within the diagnostic assessments **the need for improvement**, based upon the risk of service failure and poor outcomes, is identified using the following scale.

- a = very low
- b = low
- c = high
- d = very high

## Appendix 3 - Appointed auditor assessment

219 Appointed auditors are asked to score five areas which relate to the statutory code of audit practice. When scoring each area a range of issues are taken into account. These issues and the score that has been given in each area are set out in the table below.

Area for auditor judgement	Grade	Issues included in this area
Financial standing	4	Setting a balanced budget Setting a capital programme Financial monitoring and reporting Meeting financial targets Financial reserves
Systems of internal financial control	2	Monitoring of financial systems An adequate internal audit function is maintained Risk identification and management
Standards of financial conduct and the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption	4	Ethical framework Governance arrangements Treasury management Prevention and detection of fraud and corruption
Financial statements	4	Timeliness Quality Supporting records
Legality of significant financial transactions	3	Roles and responsibilities Consideration of legality of significant financial transactions New legislation

### Scoring key

1 = inadequate

2 = adequate overall, but some weaknesses that need to be addressed

3 = adequate

4 = good

## Appendix 4 - Benefit Fraud Inspectorate assessment

220 The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) has undertaken the assessment in this appendix as part of the CPA process. The assessment covers two aspects, the current level of performance and the council's proven capacity to improve. Each assessment is measured on a five-point scale (poor, fair, fair to good, good and excellent).

### Current performance

221 Overall, we found that Wychavon District Council's Benefits service is currently providing a **fair towards good** performance. The council's current performance demonstrates a number of strengths. These include:

- ◆ Clear links between benefits service and corporate aims and priorities.
- ◆ Policies supported the procedures manual.
- ◆ IT strategy that sets the council's aims for 2005.
- ◆ Performance monitoring system that identifies and monitors poor performance.
- ◆ Daily monitoring of outstanding work.
- ◆ Generic revenues staff.
- ◆ Staff appraisal scheme that promotes CPD including qualifications.
- ◆ Induction training for new staff.
- ◆ Charter Mark for one stop shops.
- ◆ Initiatives to ensure all communities have access to services.
- ◆ Annual customer surveys of benefit customers.
- ◆ Verification framework compliant.
- ◆ Comprehensive management checking regime.
- ◆ Claim form based on BFI model.
- ◆ Landlord information pack.
- ◆ Good practice in place to minimise internal security breaches.

222 However, there are areas where Wychavon District Council needs to develop in order to meet the BFI and Department for Work and Pensions' (the Department's) Performance Standards framework. These include:

- ◆ Bringing together the key documents which set out the benefits section targets, objectives and milestones.

- ◆ Developing a step change plan to improve recovery of overpayment BVPIs.
- ◆ Advertising availability of landlord pack.
- ◆ Setting more targets for counter fraud work.

### **Proven capacity to improve**

223 We assessed Wychavon District Council's proven capacity to improve as **fair towards good**. The council was able to demonstrate the following positive points:

- ◆ Commitment from Councillors and senior officers to improve services and a willingness to change where necessary.
- ◆ Development of IT to meet e-government targets.
- ◆ A track record of good customer care initiatives.
- ◆ The aim to provide an excellent benefits service.

224 However, the following areas need to be addressed:

- ◆ Lack of a plan to demonstrate how recovery of overpayments will reach 2003/04 target.
- ◆ No target setting for fraud section.

## Appendix 5 - Framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment

- 225 This comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999. Local councils have a general duty under Section 3 of this Act to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions. Section 10 gives the Audit Commission the power to inspect councils' performance of the general duty of improvement.
- 226 The main elements of the assessment were:
- ◆ a self-assessment completed by the council;
  - ◆ accredited peer challenge to inform the council's self-assessment;
  - ◆ a corporate assessment of the council's overall effectiveness in supporting services to deliver improvements;
  - ◆ an assessment of the council's service delivery performance through two diagnostic assessments on:
    - ◆ management of public space;
    - ◆ contribution to developing a balanced housing market;
  - ◆ Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) assessment of benefit services;
  - ◆ appointed auditor assessments of performance on each of the main elements of the code of audit practice; and
  - ◆ audited performance indicators, inspection reports and plan assessments.
- 227 The assessment for Wychavon District Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 3rd to 5<sup>th</sup> November 2004.
- 228 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.