

Inspection report

September 2004



Comprehensive performance assessment

**North West Leicestershire District
Council**

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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. 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.

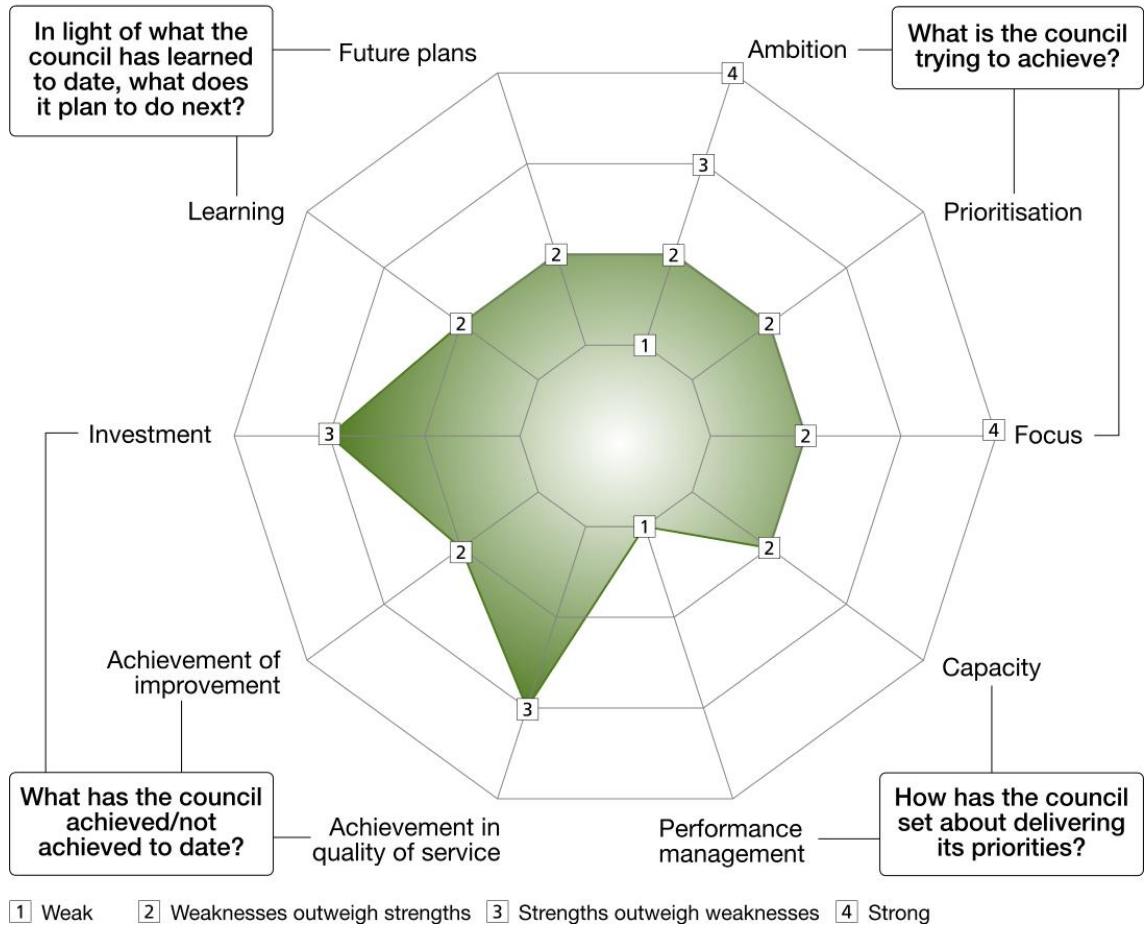
Summary of Comprehensive Performance Assessment judgements

- 4 North West Leicestershire District Council is a weak council that has not increased its rate of improvement sufficiently across all services. However it is starting to put in place the key building blocks needed to improve services for local people in the future.
- 5 The council had a clear ambition to transform the district following the decline in the mining industry in the 1980s. Having maintained focus on the economic regeneration of the district for many years the council has now taken the difficult decision to disinvest in this activity and concentrate on the legacy of issues relating to health and social well being. The council's specific long term ambition for the area is now not as clear and as a consequence, corporate strategies and plans are uncoordinated and underdeveloped with few outcomes identified.
- 6 The council provides strong leadership within the community and is respected by partners but its community planning lacks clear outcome based targets to reflect the diverse requirements of the area.
- 7 Lack of capacity is a weakness within the council. This is mainly due to significant vacancies at manager and director level and high levels of sickness absence. In addition, human resources strategies are underdeveloped and the council lacks a strategic approach to workforce planning and organisational development to make the most of its limited resources.
- 8 The council has good staff expertise and its financial standing is sound although it lacks sufficient resources to meet all of its objectives in the medium term. It uses consultants to boost capacity in areas where skills are short, but the council's approach to procurement is underdeveloped and is not robust. Relationships with partners are good, and there are some good examples of joint working which helps to make the most of the council's limited resources and it is now actively considering alternative approaches to service delivery.
- 9 A culture of performance management is not yet embedded across the council to ensure improvement in key priority areas and services. Some services are delivered well, for example housing benefits, but others such as council tax collection have been performing poorly over a period of time and are either not improving or have only shown recent significant improvement.
- 10 Performance in its cross cutting priority areas is however improving and the council has been successful in leveraging in external investment to help increase and diversify the prosperity of the local economy and improve the appearance of the locality. Employment levels for example have improved significantly and are now along side national top performers. Future projections show the economy continuing to grow.
- 11 The council has recently become open to learning lessons both externally and from within and although this learning is helping the council to plan, this is mainly in the short term. The council's plans when fully developed will require careful targeting, and the council has further work to do to turn its ambitions into specific action plans.

Summary of assessment scores

Top level question	Theme	Grade	Weighted score
What is the council trying to achieve?	Ambition	2	2
	Prioritisation	2	2
	Focus	2	2
How has the council set about delivering its priorities?	Capacity	2	2
	Performance management	1	1
What has the council achieved/not achieved to date?	Achievement in quality of service	3	9
	Achievement of improvement	2	6
	Investment	3	6
In light of what the council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	Learning	2	2
	Future plans	2	2
Weighted score			34
Corporate assessment category			Weak

North West Leicestershire District Council



North West Leicestershire District Council scored well in two out of ten of the areas assessed.

Recommendations

12 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

- 13 North West Leicestershire encompasses an area of 27,933 hectares. The resident population of 86,576 (2002) has a slightly above average proportion near to or above retirement age. At 2.6 per cent, there are relatively low numbers from ethnic minority groups. The district benefits from easy access to all major regional and national road networks.
- 14 Nottingham East Midlands Airport is located in the north of the district and has expanded considerably over recent years, becoming a major employer and a major freight terminal. There are no railway stations in the district but the council is leading a campaign for the reintroduction of passenger services between Leicester and Burton-on-Trent along the National Forest line thus improve accessibility within and beyond the district boundary.
- 15 The largest town and administrative centre is Coalville. The historic market town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch is the second largest town with the remainder of the population dispersed in smaller villages, the largest of which are Castle Donington, Ibstock, Kegworth and Measham.
- 16 Unemployment is low at 1.4 per cent. Following the very significant decline of the coal mining industry in the 1980s the district has developed a diversified economy with key areas being manufacturing, food and drink and distribution. Average earnings in the district are higher than the regional average and 97 per cent of those for England as a whole.

The council

- 17 Over the past 20 years, the council has been galvanised in the regeneration of the district in response to the devastation of the run down of the local mining industry and as a result, the local economy and environment has been transformed. In 2001 the council changed its focus from regeneration in favour of emerging priorities.
- 18 In 1999, the council revised both its political management arrangements and senior management structures. It has subsequently been operating cabinet-style government with separation of executive and scrutiny functions. There are two scrutiny boards – one for performance monitoring and the other for policy review and development. Since the May 2003 elections, the 38 councillors representing 20 wards comprise of 21 Labour councillors, with 12 Conservatives, three Liberal Democrats and two Independents. The net revenue budget in 2003/04 is £9.8 million.
- 19 Cabinet members have been allocated a specific portfolio in line with the council's key strategic aims. The council restructured in April 2004 and its management team was reduced from ten to eight chief officers – chief executive, two executive directors (one post not currently filled) and five service managers. The council employs 630 staff. The chief executive is to retire in late 2004 and at the time of the assessment the council was working with recruitment consultants to shortlist suitable candidates.

- 20 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 SOLACE in February 2003. Using the Audit Commission's scoring mechanism the council has assessed itself as 'Fair'.

What is the council trying to achieve?

Ambition

- 21 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.
- 22 The council had a clear ambition to transform the district following the decline in the mining industry in the 1980s. It was galvanised for 20 years on this agenda to improve the quality of life for local people. There has been a considerable amount of new industrial and housing development on former mine sites and others have been reclaimed and landscaped forming new tourist attractions. Employment has reduced significantly and average earnings have risen.
- 23 However, the council's current specific long term ambitions for the area are not clear. In 2001 the council changed its focus from regeneration in favour of emerging priorities such as health, low educational attainment and social well being and took the difficult decision to disband the regeneration department in March 2004.
- 24 Having had such a strong ambition, the council has struggled to develop a realistic and robust new vision that clearly sets out the outcomes that it wants to achieve and that people can identify with. The council has lost its clear focused agenda and as a consequence the vision, aims and priorities have been revised and refined several times over the past two years.
- 25 The corporate plan was revised less than six months after it was first published reflecting a lack of clear direction and resulting in a lack of ownership throughout the council.
- 26 Since 2003 the council's seven cross cutting strategic aims are:
 - ◆ high quality, good value local services;
 - ◆ strong, safe communities;
 - ◆ healthy, fulfilled population;
 - ◆ a fairer district;
 - ◆ local prosperity and employment;
 - ◆ an attractive sustainable environment; and
 - ◆ enough decent affordable homes.
- 27 These aims are not specific and there are no clear outcome based targets against which success can be measured and people can work towards.
- 28 The local strategic partnership's vision is complex with no specific outcome focused targets to demonstrate the impact on the quality of life within the district. Long term aims and expected outcomes are still to be developed through the community strategy making it difficult for the council to develop clear links to its corporate plan.

- 29 Internal leadership is good in some areas but not effectively demonstrated in others, particularly where there are or have been management shortages; here staff do not demonstrate a high level of awareness about the key issues faced.
- 30 The council does however provide strong leadership within the community. Partners see the council as a valued lead partner within the local strategic partnership, the leader of the council chaired the partnership during its development and has now stood down to enable other organisations to take ownership.
- 31 The council has played an effective strategic role in leading the community safety partnership and developing the aims of the crime and disorder reduction strategy. There are several other good partnerships, for example within the community action zones and the health forum where most councillors demonstrate commitment to strategic improvement in these areas. The recently signed compact with the voluntary sector has been recognised by partners as successful in terms of mutual understanding and involvement.

Prioritisation

- 32 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.
- 33 The breadth of the council's key focus areas are not sufficiently defined. This reflects the council's underdeveloped ambitions for the area. There are no comprehensive plans in place to address the priorities, which are:
- ◆ a clean, green safe and healthy district;
 - ◆ strong communities; and
 - ◆ revitalised town centres.
- 34 The council has not taken a consistent approach to allocating resources to priorities and is at an early stage. Resources have been targeted at some short term priority initiatives such as recycling, street cleansing and some town centre regeneration in Ashby De La Zouch and Coalville.
- 35 The council has shifted some of its resources out of the non-priority area of economic regeneration and has reorganised its staffing structure accordingly. It has also ceased its free drain rodding service and the council's withdrawn from its highways agency agreement with the county council.
- 36 The council has good intelligence gathering in general. External communication and consultation is good but the council is not able to make informed long term plans for housing stock investment due to the lack of robust information on the condition of its housing stock.
- 37 The council uses a range of mechanisms to reach local communities and hard to reach groups through surveys, press releases, newspapers and its website. Through these mechanisms it is in a position to understand the different needs, interests and perspectives of local people. For example, a survey conducted in 2001 and repeated in 2004 provided the intelligence required for the sports action plan on participation and barriers to participation which will influence work

planning for the next five years. Feedback is provided directly with participants where possible through the council's established communications channels.

- 38 Internal communication is improving corporately but despite having a set of corporate principles for communications there are still inconsistent approaches within some service areas and as a result a lack of understanding and ownership of aims and priorities is demonstrated in some areas.

Focus

- 39 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.
- 40 The council has found it hard to shift focus onto its new policy framework and focus areas. The corporate plan was in transition between November 2003 and April 2004 and has resulted in the council's ambition and priorities being in a state of flux with officers and councillors trying to hone down the number of priority activities into a manageable agenda.
- 41 The council's ability to focus over the past three years has also been hindered by staffing issues and a lack of effective mechanisms and tools. Management and executive meetings do not consistently concentrate on the delivery, development and performance of the council's focus areas.
- 42 Focus on improvements in priority areas is at an early stage. A performance management framework has recently been introduced but its approach focuses on measurement and review of performance information made up of national and local performance indicators (PIs) which do not currently give a balanced picture of delivery against the council's priorities. There is a lack of clear linkages between its key strategies and targets which would enable progress on these focus areas to be tracked and help the council stay focused on what matters.
- 43 The workplans for the performance and policy review and development scrutiny boards are not systematically driven by the council's priorities. The council's executive board has only just begun to focus on general performance information.
- 44 Due to the breadth of the focus areas there are few clear focused plans on the theme of safe, healthy and strong communities, and only one plan for town centre regeneration has been resourced to date.
- 45 The council has a track record of sustaining focus on regeneration and operationally some areas can demonstrate a sustained focus on improving front line services. The council has stayed focussed over time on investing in its housing stock and there are currently very few properties failing or likely to fail the decent homes standard. Ensuring affordable homes is a strategic aim for the council and the council has remained focused on meeting its targets through its planning policies and developer contributions. Focus on young people has been sustained over time and the council has worked in partnership to determine need and deliver a range of activities and opportunities. Corporately, plans to ensure the council will be able to stay focused over time on priorities are not yet in place.

How has the council set about delivering its priorities?

Capacity

- 46 Weaknesses outweigh strengths.
- 47 The council is under resourced at director level and the situation is expected to remain until well after the new chief executive takes up post. It is currently facing significant challenges in capacity to deliver improvements in all areas. Interim arrangements to address corporate capacity issues are only short term.
- 48 Capacity within services is weakened by vacancies within services. Key posts, for example, within the new housing structure, are vacant as are several other key posts across the council, for example the anti-poverty officer. The council is also experiencing difficulty in recruiting staff within some services.
- 49 The situation has been exacerbated by the delay in the implementation of job evaluation. Key decisions regarding the grading of some posts have been postponed for significant lengths of time and several staff are operating on temporary grading arrangements and short term appointments. There is currently no date planned for the completion of the job evaluation process and this is having a negative effect on staff morale.
- 50 The council is not maximising its capacity around enforcement. Street scene is implicit in the council's priorities, however it is not making the most of its front line workforce who do not have the powers to issue penalty notices to offenders who for example fly-tip or drop litter.
- 51 The council's human resources policies are not sufficiently developed to tackle challenges in capacity. Co-ordinated under a strategic human resources strategy, many plans are lacking detailed action plans with responsibilities and timescales allocated.
- 52 The council cannot ensure it can meet demands expected of a modern public sector organisation. It has not conducted an overall skills/needs assessment or prepared a workforce development plan. Although new councillors' training needs have been identified there is no structured training programme for all councillors based on individual needs.
- 53 Corporate governance arrangements are developing. The council introduced a corporate governance framework in 2003, with officers accountable for the maintenance and review of all key policies. Although the framework ensures that annual reviews of key policies take place it does not help the council strategically improve governance arrangements in a co-ordinated way. Members' roles in corporate governance are not clear.
- 54 Despite these capacity issues, officers at service level demonstrate their knowledge, capability and enthusiasm and most are clear about their role within the organisation. The council is starting to address issues which affect its capacity to deliver improvements. Some human resource plans, for example sickness absence and recruitment, are better developed.

- 55 Members are clear about their scrutiny roles and political tensions are not evident. Other observations of meetings showed that most members were strategically focused but continue to work in a committee style.
- 56 Training across the council is perceived by staff to be good. The council is investing in staff training to develop skills and induction. Its performance development system identifies staff training needs and there are examples of training to develop generic working in leisure and benefits.
- 57 External auditors have confirmed that the council has a sound financial standing and that financial accounts are prepared to a satisfactory quality with good supporting records. The council's medium term financial plan has identified a short fall in resources in 2006.
- 58 The council is improving capacity in some areas where performance is poor, for example in planning where it has also improved powers of delegation to speed up decision making, and it is using consultants where it lacks internal skills and capacity. Consultants are also used to boost capacity, for example in housing where they are working with the council to develop a partnering approach to delivering responsive repairs.
- 59 The council is improving its capacity through partnership working across the council for example within community safety, waste management, and e-government. This is enabling the council to deliver positive outcomes which meet the diverse needs of the community. For example its child protection policy has been developed proactively in conjunction with partners to ensure consistency across agencies.
- 60 The council's strategic approach to exploring alternative methods of service delivery is becoming more open. Examples of maximising capacity through working in partnership include tourism promotions, housing repairs and benefit take up.

Performance management

- 61 Weak with few identifiable strengths.
- 62 The council is just beginning to develop its performance management framework. Service plans are developing but there are no robust linkages between these and the community and corporate aims. In addition there are few local indicators to reflect quality of life issues. Service planning and financial planning cycles have not been aligned in the past. The council plans to use draft 2005/06 service plans to drive resource allocation next year.
- 63 Despite the capacity issues described earlier, performance management is being moved forward through the appointment of a performance officer. This however is keeping the focus of performance management at the corporate centre with the performance officer leading and presenting performance information to councillors. It is not clear how all service managers are taking ownership and actively managing performance within their areas.
- 64 The performance culture is not yet fully embedded and performance management systems are not developed sufficiently to ensure that services

continue to improve. Reporting and monitoring of financial and service performance is still at an early stage and underdeveloped.

- 65 Individual staff performance is not appraised. As a result staff are not able to fully understand their role in the achievement of the council's priorities and managers are not able to monitor and manage staff performance.
- 66 Performance management within some partnerships is weak. Members of the crime and disorder reduction partnership have identified that performance management is a significant area of weakness and that the action plan cannot be adequately monitored. There are no current plans to address this issue.
- 67 There are no measurable service standards and targets in place. The council's complaints handling system is inconsistent and is not analysed corporately to drive improvements.
- 68 Value for money within the council and its partners is not addressed in a systematic way. The council's best value review programme is currently on hold, and the council's procurement strategy is underdeveloped. Standing orders are suspended on a relatively frequent basis to enable the council to short cut procurement procedures. The council does not have a preferred partner list for registered social landlords (RSLs) and works almost exclusively with one partner, this does not demonstrate best value for money or competitiveness.
- 69 Accountability has not been driven down the organisation reflecting the lack of a fully developed performance management culture. The council has just started to delegate accountability for performance and financial management to below director and head of service level. Financial planning and monitoring is still seen as predominantly accountants' responsibilities.
- 70 Overall, risk assessment and management is developing, but it has yet to become integrated into the council's performance management arrangements at any level. The council has introduced a risk policy and strategy and corporate register but risk management has not yet been incorporated into service planning and budget setting.

What has the council achieved / not achieved to date?

Achievement in quality of service

- 71 Strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 72 The quality of the council's services varies. A number of key services, such as leisure, benefits and housing, are historically high performing however some services are poor. Overall satisfaction with council services, which was 57 per cent in 2001, amongst the bottom 25 per cent of councils and is worse than predicted performance when levels of deprivation are taken into account. Un-audited figures for 2003 show this figure is now 51 per cent.
- 73 Although the comparative performance of the council, as measured by national performance indicators, shows a mixed picture it does highlight the high performance being achieved in some areas. The 2002/03 figures for national best value performance indicators (BVPIs) – the most recent available for comparative performance – showed that 51 per cent of the council's BVPIs were above average. Thirty four per cent were in the top 25 per cent, these include housing benefits, rent collection, missed bins and the standard of housing provision. Twenty nine per cent were among the bottom 25 per cent of councils, these include disability access, planning applications, the percentage of household waste collected, recycling and council tax collection. Crime levels in the district are average.

Regeneration

- 74 Through the provision of a high quality regeneration service the council has been successful in attracting external funding to help increase and diversify the prosperity of the local economy and improve the appearance of the locality. Examples of the successes in this area include the £3.4 million reclamation of the Rawdon and Marquis collieries and £2 million employment park.
- 75 The district is now in the heart of the National Forest – a long way off from the heart of the coal fields 20 years ago. Regeneration of the district following the closure of the coal fields has been a key priority for the past 20 years and there are numerous examples of the significant contribution the council has made to the area.

A clean, green safe and healthy district

- 76 In partnership with others, the council has contributed to a thriving tourism industry within the district. Through tourism promotions, tourist information centres, events and initiatives such as Snibson Discovery Park and Conkers, over two and a half million tourists visit the district each year with an estimated £107 million visitor spend. The council is also piloting a new destination management system which enables the council to know more about its customers and target the promotional and development needs for tourists.
- 77 The council operates several projects to address health issues in partnership with Charnwood / North West Leicestershire PCT, for example exercise referral, 'Happy Hearts Day' when several hundred people took part, chronic obstructive

pulmonary disease/coronary heart disease classes at a local surgery, stop smoking talks at local schools, junior citizens scheme and a safety equipment loan scheme. The GP 'exercise referral' programme is widely recognised as an example of good practice.

- 78 Inspectors of the council's leisure centres judged them to be providing a 'good' two star service. Hood Park and Hermitage Leisure Centres form the focal point of the council's leisure provision. Hood Park has benefited from a £2.8 million investment recently. In total both centres have 2,234 'lifestyle' members, 1,940 learn to swim members and 377 corporate members from 19 companies. The council's 16,000 Activ8 card holders will soon be able to book activities over the internet.
- 79 The council provides appropriately for difficult to reach young people. The positive futures joint partnership scheme takes referrals of the top 50 most at risk young people. Attendance records at schools and educational attainment has improved. Positive futures was recently chosen as a regional case study for the East Midlands. The leisure links concessionary access scheme offers free and half price swimming to qualifying young people. Leaflets about activities for young people are distributed regularly to 26,000 local homes. The council's website includes a dedicated youth area and a sports club directory lists 106 local sports clubs including more than half with junior sections. High and sustained attendance figures demonstrate that the sporting needs of young people are being met.
- 80 At 89 per cent in 2000/01, satisfaction with waste collection was best quartile performance. In a recent survey 79 per cent of parish councils agreed that refuse collection and recycling arrangements are well provided in the local area, with just 21 per cent disagreeing. Abandoned vehicles are dealt with promptly. In a recent survey 71 per cent of parish councils agreed that abandoned vehicles are cleared away quickly.
- 81 The council is successfully promoting its recycling and composting schemes. At a one-day event in May 2004, 918 home composters were sold. A total of 5000 units are in place to date across the district. Un-audited figures for 2003/04 show that at 14.3 per cent, the recycling target of 16 per cent has not been met.

Strong communities

- 82 The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate judged the council's benefits service as a 'good' two star service. The service performs well against the national performance indicators and has consistently performed within the top quartile for processing claims and changes in circumstances. The council is proactively promoting benefits take up through the voluntary sector.
- 83 The council is helping people to remain in their homes by proving interest free loans to improve unfit properties.

Revitalised town centres

- 84 The council is only now beginning to focus on this new priority and as a result there are few tangible outcomes yet. Coalville market hall reopened in March 2004 following a £200,000 extensive refurbishment and is well used.

- 85 Heritage economic regeneration scheme (HERS) grants have been made available in the Ashby town centre conservation area by the council to help fund repairs to commercial buildings.

Achievement of improvement

- 86 Weaknesses outweigh strengths.
- 87 The council can show significant improvements in its previous priority areas of regeneration, but it cannot demonstrate the same improvement in its new priority areas as it has not clearly set out all the outcomes that it wants to achieve. Performance remains poor in some other services.
- 88 Improvement in BVPIs is mixed and the majority have deteriorated or stayed the same. Ten (42 per cent) indicators showed an improvement in performance including rent collected, theft from motor vehicles, invoices paid, council tax collection and housing benefits. Fourteen (58 per cent) 2002/03 indicators have not improved including planning applications, waste collected and recycling. Un-audited PIs indicate that there has been improvement over the past 12 months in these three areas and council tax collection and trends in the re-letting of council properties are improving. The residents' satisfaction survey undertaken in 2003 which has not yet been audited indicates that satisfaction with many services is still low.
- 89 In partnership with others, the council has improved the quality of life for local people over time. As a result of the council's focus on its previous priority of regeneration, there are many improvements to the economy and physical environment. The council has contributed to employment within the district which is now at an all-time high with levels of unemployment reducing from 18 per cent overall to 1.4 per cent. Compared to the UK as a whole, the district has shown stronger growth rates in employment for example in construction, distribution, hotels and catering, transport and communications. Future projections show the economy continuing to grow. Average earnings are now the highest in the sub-region.

A clean, green safe and healthy district

- 90 The volume of waste collected remains in the worst quartile when compared nationally although there have been some recent improvements. The council is addressing the growth in the volume of waste collected which has been reduced by 15 kilograms in the past year and is against national trends.
- 91 The council is improving the street scene and has introduced additional resources to the street cleaning service. However, the council's own survey indicates that satisfaction has declined.
- 92 With partners, the council is contributing to reduction in crime:
- ◆ Investment in CCTV has had an impact on reducing crime and has contributed in an increased number of successful prosecutions. In Coalville town centre, crime incidents have decreased by 25 per cent in one year.

- ◆ National burglary and vehicle crime targets are on course. Theft of vehicles exceeded its targeted reduction in 2002/03.

93 The council has sustained investment in non traditional properties and has improved the estates across the district and ensured that demand for housing is maintained. The council's tenant's choice budget has contributed to environmental improvements in housing estates.

Strong communities

94 The council has an effective approach to addressing issues in its most deprived wards through its two community action zones (CAZs). The neighbourhood warden and community shop has provided a focal point for the community in Greenhill and reduced social exclusion and crime by 24 per cent in 18 months.

Revitalised town centres

95 As this is a relatively new priority, work is in progress but improved outcomes have still to be achieved.

Investment

96 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area.

97 The council has invested over the past year in corporate systems, service plans and strategies and in developing partnerships to build capacity and enable future improvements in services.

98 This investment (although relatively recently) is being targeted at areas where the council has identified weaknesses. The IIP assessment reconfirms that the council has improved its human resources and performance management strategies. The council recognises that there are still improvements to be made and it has begun to address staff recruitment and sickness absence through several initiatives. These include better monitoring, quicker medical referrals, stress awareness training for managers and the introduction of a counselling scheme for staff.

99 The council has demonstrated its commitment to staff development by providing free training courses at the local college. Management training is now seen as a priority and the council is investing in a management competencies appraisal.

100 The council has a good track record for obtaining funding for regeneration. Examples include £3.5 million secured to improve the council's sports facilities and £200,000 developer contribution towards environmental improvements in the Sence Valley area.

101 The council is addressing its historically poor recycling performance, which has resulted in a marked improvement in 2003/04. Following a best value review and subsequent inspection of waste management (fair and with promising prospects) the council provided new funds over four years to expand door-to-door recycling schemes throughout the district. Significant funding has also been drawn in for recycling and through LPSA targets. DEFRA challenge funding of £1.1 million has also been awarded which will enable the council to extend recycling further.

Local bulking facilities are to be developed which will enable the kerbside collection of glass in 2005/06.

- 102 The council has acknowledged that the council's and government's priorities may not fully meet tenant priorities. As a result it has set aside a tenant's choice budget of £90,000. This is spent on programmes for environmental works in consultation with tenants. Targeted investment has substantially reduced the percentage of non decent properties which the council assesses to be just under 5 per cent.
- 103 The council is addressing key areas for improvement through cross council improvement teams for performance management, communications, and training and motivation where results are already being recognised by staff.
- 104 The council is improving service delivery and access by meeting its e-government targets and investing in several new ICT systems in areas such as leisure centres, revenues, housing and planning. It has also provided extra resources in response to poor performance in the council tax section. Through local government on-line funding the council is developing databases to share information with its partners within the county.
- 105 The council is investing in aspects of diversity within the district. It is leading on a housing strategy for people with learning difficulties which is improving their housing provision across the county.
- 106 Scrutiny is being improved by positively encouraging external challenge through the chairman who represents the opposition party and also representation from the council's youth council and tenants association who have full voting rights.
- 107 The council has responded positively to external audit and inspection reports. Progress against action plans are reported regularly to the management team and executive board. Following the inspection of the council's support services a new improvement plan has been implemented. The inspection of the development control function has lead to additional investment and a new delegation scheme.
- 108 Only 6 per cent of the council's buildings are accessible to people with disabilities. This limits peoples' abilities to access services. Despite having carried out an assessment of property and undertaking staff training the council is unlikely to comply with its statutory obligations.
- 109 The council is progressing town centre developments in Ashby-de-la-Zouche and Coalville. A published strategy for Ashby was produced by consultants but ownership by local people has still to be addressed. Corporate support for new investment is not well co-ordinated in terms of advice and actions concerning planning, environmental health, highways and sustainability issues.
- 110 The council has further work to do in the areas of community safety and procurement. It has not reviewed all of its activities to ensure crime and disorder issues are systematically addressed. Programmes and contract monitoring are traditional in nature and within housing modern procurement methods have not been explored.

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

Learning

- 111 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.
- 112 Overall systems and culture are not in place to ensure that learning is systematically sought and shared across the authority to improve services. Where the council has made progress the learning has not been translated into improved council performance.
- 113 The council uses benchmarking information for performance comparison with its nearest neighbour group and all district councils but benchmarking is not sufficiently challenging as national comparisons or benchmarking against all councils is not evident.
- 114 The council does not have a track record of proactively learning through experience from both successes and failures and making changes in the light of this. The council has used the CPA process and peer review to clarify its strengths and weaknesses and is aware of some of the challenges it faces and the barriers still to be tackled but this is relatively new and progress to address them is limited.
- 115 The council recognises that it needs to establish formal channels to share best practice. It has improved exit interviews with staff once they have left the organisation to gain an understanding and to inform improvements. It has also improved training evaluation to ensure that views are given confidentially. Progress in this area is very limited however and has not yet impacted on council performance.
- 116 The council shares some learning across the organisation through the use of improvement teams in the three key areas of performance management, training and motivation and communications. This has had an impact on training and communications, but performance management remains underdeveloped.
- 117 The council participates in some external networks where there is sharing of training, knowledge and expertise between authorities, for example, the joint waste management group and it has shown its willingness to share knowledge by participating in a housing forum however it only meets on an annual basis.
- 118 There are examples though where the council learns from others to develop service improvements, for example through its better communications initiative and by involving external influences in its scrutiny procedures. Youth council and tenant representatives have a voting place on the policy review and development scrutiny board. It has also used good practice from another authority in relation to a best value review in housing and drawn upon the experience of Leicester in relation to introducing an appointment system for responsive repairs.

Future plans

- 119 Weaknesses outweigh strengths.
- 120 Work is under way with the LSP to establish detailed plans to underpin the council's ambitions. However, there is a lack of consistency between strategies as a result of the council going through a phase of transition in its corporate planning and due to the speed and scale of recent changes in its structure to meet its new priorities.
- 121 Longer-term strategic planning is at a relatively early stage, with specific medium and long-term outcomes against the council's priorities not yet agreed in most areas and few plans have resources allocated. There are however some strategies and plans with resources allocated for example in housing, town centre regeneration and street cleansing.
- 122 Some plans, for example human resources, vary in quality and lack identification of resources, clear action plans with milestones, targets and quality of life outcomes and are not robust enough to ensure capacity will be in place to deliver the council's ambitions.
- 123 Several strategies such as the anti-poverty strategy are out of date and under review, but progress has been slow due to a shortage of staff resources.
- 124 There are plans to boost the corporate centre of the council through bringing key staff together under the internal executive director to provide a corporate support team. This team will be boosted by the appointment of a corporate initiatives officer. However, the impact this post will make will be limited as the appointment is only for six months.
- 125 The housing strategy and HRA business plan do not yet meet the government's 'fit for purpose' criteria although the timescale for completion is not until July 2005. The criteria in respect of monitoring and performance, action plans, links to other areas and addressing resources to priorities is underdeveloped and the housing business plan has not been developed since 2002 as it is awaiting the new stock survey.
- 126 The medium term financial plan represents a positive approach to financial management. The council is currently addressing the financial short fall in year three.
- 127 The Government Office East Midlands has assessed the 2003/04 capital strategy as good fully corporate document showing clear links with the aims, priorities and key objectives of the council. It also assessed the 2003/04 asset management plan as good as it clearly sets out organisational arrangements for asset management. The council has identified funds in the 2004/05 budget for work on its leisure centres to become compliant with the DDA.
- 128 Service plans have now been in place for two years and are developing. Through the countywide partnership, the council is leading on data sharing and improving joined up information and services to help the council meet its e-government targets. The draft e-government strategy is developing and the first three IEG statements have all had approval and funding with the latest strategy focusing on

delivering more accessible and improved services, although plans have yet to be developed to improve accessibility in the more remote parts of the district.

Summary of theme scores and strengths / weaknesses

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambitious over a long period of time • Strong community leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity about future ambitions • Long term plans and outcomes are not clear • Inconsistent internal leadership
Prioritisation	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-prioritised regeneration – some resources shifted to new priority areas • Comprehensive external consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively new priorities • Housing stock condition data – not verified • Inconsistent communications – internally
Focus	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stayed focused on regeneration and housing investment over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms to enable focus not well developed • Scrutiny not fully focused on priorities • Executive only just beginning to focus on performance
Capacity	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training • External partnerships • Openness to alternative procurement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under resourced at director level • A number of vacant posts and short term appointments in staffing • Job evaluation implementation still not resolved • HR strategies underdeveloped • Lack of individual training needs for members identified
Performance management	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate performance officer appointed • Service delivery plans in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance management culture not fully embedded • Lack of ownership in departments • Performance reporting and monitoring under developed • No individual performance appraisal process for staff • Service and financial planning processes not integrated • No corporate approach to procurement • No customer focused service standards
Achievement in quality of service	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality regeneration service • Thriving tourism • Good leisure provision • 34% PIs top quartile • Top quartile performance in benefits and standards of housing • Young people initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall satisfaction with council bottom quartile • Satisfaction with many services is low • Bottom quartile performance in council tax collection, planning, waste collection and recycling

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement of improvement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regeneration has improved quality of life • Improvement in planning, waste and recycling PIs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 58% national BVPIs not improving • Satisfaction with many services is low and declining • Few identifiable improvements in priority areas
Investment	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have invested in several corporate building blocks • Significant Inward investment • Investing in recycling and successful DEFRA challenge bid • EFQM based improvement teams • Successful IIP reassessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 6% of council buildings accessible to people with disabilities • Procurement in housing
Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming more self aware • Some good examples of learning from others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatives not yet impacted on performance • Knowledge not shared • Performance comparisons not challenging
Future plans	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital strategy and asset management plan assessed as 'good' • Medium term financial strategy in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate plan in transition • Some strategies and plans lack milestones, targets and real outcome measures • Housing strategy and business plan not yet fit for purpose

Scoring key:

1 – Weak

2 – Weaknesses outweigh strengths

3 – Strengths outweigh weaknesses

4 – Strong

Appendix 1 – Decent homes standard (DHS) diagnostic assessment

What is the council trying to achieve in relation to the standard? Does the council know the condition of their housing stock and their compliance with the decent homes standard?

- 129 There is a very high risk of service failure or poor outcomes in this area.
- 130 Housing is not one of the council's three focus areas. The housing strategy is set within the theme of 'quality and choice, a decent home for all' with three key themes below. The one relevant to DHS is 'raising the standards of social housing'. Meeting the decent homes standard (DHS) is expressed as part of its wider objectives to deliver long term sustainability. There are links between corporate strategies, the LSP and the community strategy and the housing strategy and business plan. These will be developed as the fit for purpose strategy is completed. However, the link to service priorities is not clear. The council's ambition to meet DHS by 2010 is not clearly articulated as a priority or widely understood by staff and tenants. There is no evidence amongst councillors and managers of a commitment to improvements beyond the minimum prescribed standards.
- 131 The position in relation to the DHS as at 1 April 2003 was that 6.78 per cent of the stock (336 properties) did not meet the standard. The current (2003/04 un-audited) figure is that 4.86 per cent of a stock of 4,818 fail the standard. This equates to a change of 62.5 per cent. This indicates that targeted investment has substantially reduced the non decent properties, but this is based on internal information that has not been externally validated.
- 132 The council has invested in the housing stock over several years but its understanding of the investment needs is based to a great degree on local knowledge. An in-house stock condition survey began in 2002 with an initial sample of 12 per cent (600 properties) covering all property types. To date 1,640 properties have been surveyed. The type and extent of data to be collected during the survey was selected in accordance with DETR guidelines but prior to the DHS guidance. The survey collected condition data on a range of property attributes. The survey also collected NHER information relating to energy efficiency. This stock information has been used to generate a baseline position which informed future planned maintenance programmes. The quality of the baseline information cannot be demonstrated.
- 133 A challenge facing the council is to obtain detailed information concerning the design and condition of their stock in order to ascertain the number of properties that fail the standard, the cost of bringing them up to the standard and determining the cost of properties that will deteriorate up to 2010 which would result in future failure. The in-house stock condition survey is not robust enough for the council to confidently make these predictions. The survey was undertaken by an operative who was not skilled or qualified in this area. Training provided was very limited.
- 134 The council has commissioned an external stock condition survey on a 15 per cent sample of the stock in order to obtain the detailed information required to use as a more robust business planning tool. This will also inform the stock

options appraisal which is underway and play a key role in future partnering arrangements.

- 135 A parallel survey was to be undertaken to compile data for the housing stock asbestos register. Only 70 properties were surveyed as a result of contractor issues. A new external survey has been commissioned to survey 10 per cent of the properties. The external stock condition survey will also collect asbestos data and will enable an asbestos register to be developed. Current legislation does not cover domestic properties but it will apply to communal areas. It is likely that there will be implications for the council that have not been fully assessed. The current business plan does not make it clear whether there is provision if there is a need to remove asbestos from dwellings and how this will impact on financial resources required.
- 136 The survey database collects information on the requirement for and the cost of the provision of loft insulation where appropriate. Further information on cavity wall insulation and heating systems is recorded. The average SAP rating achieved was 56 in 2002/03 and un-audited performance indicators show an improvement to 57,6 for 2003/04.
- 137 The current housing management IT system (saffron) is dated and limited in its capacity. There is not an integrated property database. Stock information is held in a stand alone access database, linked to the housing management system only by address. Information from the stock survey is input manually and updated manually following planned programmes. The database is only updated on an annual basis with information from responsive repairs and void works. The asbestos information is not integrated but is held on a separate system. The database is also updated with insulation data, but does not hold SAP ratings at property level. The stock data covers all elements of the DHS criteria and user defined reports can be produced as a basis for profiling programmes. However, these will be based on information that is not fully up to date.
- 138 The council has made considerable investment in a new IT system and the old system will be replaced in a phased roll out across the council. This will provide a fully integrated system for asset management linked to maintenance. This is in the early stages of development and the housing element is due to be in place by February 2005. The new IT is to be developed in conjunction with the external surveyors to ensure that information can be updated. The current database information will be migrated into the new system.
- 139 There are mechanisms in place for tenant influence at the strategic level of housing services. There is a tenant consultation framework in place to develop strategies and policies. Whilst there is evidence in the housing strategy that stakeholders and tenants are consulted, there is less evidence that there is meaningful involvement of tenants in the decision making process. Tenants priorities are fed into the strategy through a consultation day but they are not represented on the housing strategy steering group and local performance indicators are not developed with tenants. Although there is clearly a framework in place there was a mixed picture presented on how effective this was in consulting tenants on the council's ambitions and deciding priorities.
- 140 There is a framework in place for consulting tenants on the priorities for the planned programme through the tenant forum where residents associations are represented. There is evidence that tenants have had some meaningful influence

in changing the programme. However, the tenants' newsletter is only produced annually and outside of the formal structure, tenants receive limited information on programmes underway. In acknowledgement that the council and government priorities to meet DHS may not fully meet tenant priorities, a 'tenant's choice budget' of £90,000 per annum has been set aside. This is spent on programmes of environmental works of tenants' choosing decided by the tenants' forum who make recommendations to the executive board.

- 141 The council has good housing needs and demand information which it has used to inform investment decisions and direct its future enabling activity. A housing needs study was undertaken in 2003 and data from the council's own sources was added, which forecast future housing need. Demand for council property is high, which is compounded by the increasing values of property in the district.

- 142 The provision of affordable housing is a key priority in the community strategy and a strategic objective within the corporate plan. The council have used housing needs information in their future plans. The affordable housing requirement identified for 2003 was 104 dwellings. The council have been successful in meeting their targets by working with RSLs and using the planning system to negotiate with developers to meet identified needs.

- 143 All of the options for the stock have not yet been evaluated. The council carried out an options appraisal in 2002 which did not fully meet the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) guidelines. A second options appraisal is underway and a consultant has been commissioned. A stock option steering group has been established which includes tenants. Tenants will also be involved in the selection of an independent tenant adviser (ITA). The expectation is that the options appraisal will be complete by Autumn 2004. A full evaluation of all the options will be undertaken, taking into account the key objectives for the housing service as identified in the housing strategy.

- 144 The housing strategy and HRA business plan do not yet meet the governments 'fit for purpose' criteria. The timescale for completion is July 2005. The criteria in respect of monitoring and performance, action plans and links to other areas and addressing resources to priorities needs further development.

- 145 The council are not in a position to ensure that the housing strategy, which is a corporate document and the HRA business plan are shaped to enable the council to be in a position to meet DHS. They do not have reliable data to base it upon and options have not been fully appraised. The business plan is a key document and supports the housing strategy. The business plan has not been developed since 2002. When the new stock survey is complete there will be a need for a complete review.

- 146 The HRA business plan and housing strategy are supported by the council's asset management and capital strategy. These have been rated as good by the government office. The capital strategy is a fully corporate document and is the framework within which capital investment is procured, operated and evaluated. It shows clear links with aims, priorities and key objectives of the council. However, the strategy does not demonstrate how performance management information can be utilised to improve services and service delivery. The asset management strategy sets out organisational arrangements for corporate asset management. The government office felt that the asset management strategy did not fully

demonstrate how user and stakeholder via consultation were being used to shape and develop performance measures.

Is the council delivering its plans to meet the decent homes standard?

- 147 There is a very high risk of service failure or poor outcomes in this area.
- 148 The council have undertaken an assessment of the current resources available to support investment in the housing stock, prior to a comprehensive option appraisal. An evaluation of the budget headings within the housing revenue account (HRA) has taken place. The capital investment programme is in the HRA business plan over five years. Capital receipts from housing sales are re-cycled back into the housing stock to fund capital investment. The business plan does not consider the impact of changes to the management and maintenance allowances from April 2004. This has resulted in a small increase of 5 per cent on a budget of £271,000 which has not been prioritised.
- 149 The capital programme has been geared to meeting DHS. The current HRA is structured to ensure that sufficient funds are available to meet the investment needs in the short term. Although this is not based on reliable data and the aims are unclear. This includes major repairs allowance and capital receipts of £3,100 million in 2002/03, £3,150 million in 2004/05, £3,315 million in 2005/06 and £3,562 million in 2006/07 but does not include any longer term forecasts.
- 150 Programmes and contract monitoring are traditional in nature and modern procurement methods using Egan principles involving shared risk, supply chain management, incentive performance indicators and contractor liaison with tenants have not been explored. Although procurement methods are under developed, following the best value review (2003) of repairs and maintenance the partnering approach is being developed with consultants. Initially partnering will be used in the delivery of responsive repairs and will be implemented by February 2005. The contract will be for £1 million with the possibility to extend to £10 million. This will be sufficient to cover the delivery of the planned works however corporate procurement strategies do not currently provide guidance on developing partnering on contracts.
- 151 There is little interface between property services and maintenance other than monthly meetings and there is no formal service level agreement in place. The majority of the planned programmes are delivered by the corporate property service department which decides the specification, procure and project manage the programmes. It also acts as clerk of works and influences the quality of the programme. The service has not been market tested for cost efficiency.
- 152 In terms of capacity to deliver there is evidence of adequate capital planning and the programme is on target for full budget spending. The programme is monitored at a departmental level by property services and reported to the asset management group.
- 153 Planned programmes have been used to improve the condition of the stock identified through the stock condition information and targeted at DHS. Some planned programmes link related work in a package, for example non traditional, will include windows, doors, roofs, brick cladding, insulation and paths. Cladding programmes will also include windows, fascias, and rainwater goods. The council maximise opportunities by undertaking work to void properties and other works

are undertaken on an elemental basis. Where the council invests in stock it also addresses energy efficiency and an extensive insulation programme has been undertaken. The ratio of planned responsive maintenance is an indicator that would show if the council are maximising capacity or not. The council do not collect data on this as a local performance indicator and data collected within the maintenance department is not validated and therefore unreliable as a measure of performance.

- 154 Addressing the needs of the non traditional stock has been a priority. Ten per cent of the stock is non traditional build and the council has made substantial investment that pre-dates DHS. However, there has been no analysis of future needs of the non traditional properties against the DHS criteria and the council's assumptions that they meet DHS have not been verified.
- 155 The council's monitoring of performance against the DHS suggest that they have been successful in reducing non decency in the properties. However, this has not been achieved within a strategic framework or based on reliable data. Tenant satisfaction with planned programmes is not measured and the council are unable to substantiate their assumptions that they are tackling non decency effectively.

How well does the council monitor its progress and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?

- 156 There is a very high risk of service failure or poor outcomes in this area.
- 157 There are no specific targets for meeting DHS and no action plan developed as part of the business plan. The improvement programme is based on the forthcoming years capital budget and is monitored for spend against budget and for progress. The stock survey was targeted at areas based on property information held, confirming the condition of elements within the DHS criteria and targeting programmes on a worse first basis. The council planned to meet the government targets through the planned programme.
- 158 There are mechanisms in place to review progress on the capital programme. Monitoring statements are produced monthly by the property services department. These are used to monitor progress on a quarterly basis by the asset management monitoring group. Reports go to the corporate management team and to elected members. There is little evidence of action following monitoring, to address any issues.
- 159 Building blocks to enable future improvements in housing and building services have been put in place. The best value review of repairs and maintenance in 2003, has been a driver for change within the maintenance service. A new corporate structure has been implemented from April 2004. However, there are doubts over the council's capacity to deliver improved performance and to develop the partnering approach due to key posts in the structure being vacant and the time it will take for the structure to embed and deliver results. The implementation and success of these plans will be crucial in driving improved performance within the housing services.
- 160 The performance management systems are not robust and do not drive performance. There is little evidence that findings via consultation are being used to help shape and develop performance measures. There is no evidence of

comparisons of performance and competitiveness of property services with similar organisations and other service providers to demonstrate value for money.

- 161 The maintenance department operates on very traditional lines with limited evidence of a performance monitoring framework or challenge to the status quo. Monitoring of contractor performance is limited and benchmarking undertaken following the waiver of standing orders is not challenging. Procurement of contracts in maintenance does not demonstrate value for money and there is evidence of standing orders being waived rather than tendering for work. The corporate property services department undertakes capital work on behalf of housing but there is no service level agreement in place. There is limited monitoring of the service provided by property services through monthly meetings and monitoring of departmental targets. There has been no market testing of the service undertaken. Maintenance performance is reported to the performance monitoring group but no challenge has been made.
- 162 The council is just beginning to develop its performance management system. The performance culture is not yet fully embedded and performance management systems do not ensure that housing services continue to improve. The performance management system in place emphasises monitoring performance indicators and any targets set but is less focussed on how to learn from performance successes or failures.
- 163 Accountants are actively involved in financial planning and monitoring. There are monthly budget monitoring meetings with housing management and maintenance managers and the HRA accountant. More robust monitoring of budgets has been implemented following a previous overspend. Variations are reported but it is not clear how robust remedial actions are taken to address areas of potential concern. Housing is reported to the performance monitoring board, two tenants are members of this board and a sub meeting looks at repairs expenditure.
- 164 The council do not make use of regular satisfaction surveys of the improvement programme. There is little monitoring of customer satisfaction of the performance of the contractor and the quality of the work. This is inspected by the clerk of works within property services. There is no tenant liaison officer working with tenants in areas where improvement programmes are underway. Any liaison with tenants is undertaken by the clerk of works. There are no customer panels for major projects and no mechanisms in place to evidence that any learning is acted upon in future projects.
- 165 Risk management is not well developed within housing services. The risk of not meeting DHS has not yet been fully evaluated. Although the council has a plan in place and is considering alternative models of ownership and management through the options appraisal, a comprehensive risk assessment is not in place. The position the council would be in if stock retention were the preferred option and if the external stock survey underway does not correlate to the internal forecast of funding required and what risks would arise if future income streams fell, for example through accelerated right to buy sales, has not been fully considered.
- 166 The council has demonstrated some learning from others as part of the best value review of repairs and maintenance. There is some evidence to show how it has progressed as a result. However, the mechanisms for learning are not

developed and remain patchy rather than a tool which drives improvement in a coordinated way.

- 167 There is some evidence that the council uses good practice from other authorities and that this has been adopted in relation to the recent best value review. The council has drawn upon the experience of Leicester in relation to introducing an appointment system for responsive repairs but plans are not fully developed. The council use benchmarking information for performance comparison with its nearest neighbour group, but benchmarking is not challenging and national comparisons or benchmarking with the best is not evident. There is limited evidence that the council has established networks through joint working groups with neighbouring authorities.

Summary of decent homes standard diagnostic judgements and strengths / weaknesses

Area of focus	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
What is the council trying to achieve in relation to the standard? Does the council know the condition of their housing stock and their compliance with the decent homes standard?	d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate vision linked to housing objectives. • Council stock information has been translated into a programme to meet DHS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business plan rated average, but does not yet meet fit for purpose • Housing priorities unclear, DHS is a strategic objective • Mixed picture on meaningful tenant involvement in the development of plans and strategies • Internal stock data is not robust enough to inform business planning and investment • No integrated stock database • Asbestos not part of programmes
Is the council delivering its plans to meet the decent homes standard?	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital receipts used for planned programmes • Investment is focussed on DHS • Programmes have been delivered within budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnering arrangements underdeveloped (Egan agenda) in planned programmes • Investment programme does not reflect tenants aspirations • No analysis of non traditional properties against DHS criteria • No analysis of long term investment needs of properties, newly arising etc • Programme delivery is generally traditional
How well does the council monitor its progress and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?	d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme performance is reported to CMT and performance monitoring group • Tenant consultation feeds into future programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No DHS action plan • Performance management is weak • Capacity/skills to develop procurement approach • No evaluation of risk of not meeting the standard • External challenge is limited • Procurement does not demonstrate value for money • No monitoring of customer satisfaction of the planned programme • Mixed picture around communication to tenants on the planned programme • Mechanisms for learning not developed
Decent homes standard diagnostic assessment judgement		D	

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?

- 168 There is a low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.
- 169 The council has been effective in addressing the environmental legacy of the former mining areas through its regeneration and partnering activities. The area's disused mining infrastructure has been removed and the quality of the local environment improved through major regeneration of the former coalfields and support for the National Forest development. An example of its success is the £3.4 million reclamation of the Rawdon and Marquis collieries. These measures have improved the appearance of the area and reduced unemployment, which has reduced from much higher levels pertaining when the mines were closed and almost halved in February 2004 to 1.4 per cent as against 2.5 per cent in 2001.
- 170 Planning policy and decisions actively promote quality and sustainable development. Comprehensive supplementary planning guidance (SPG) for developers is available via the council's website. SPG and Section 106 agreements are consistent with and add value to the local plan and Section 106 agreements are working well, particularly for applications within the National Forest area where tree planting is encouraged. Local planning decisions are monitored with councillors insistent on enforcement and follow up.
- 171 The council is making progress towards achieving its statutory planning response targets. Planning performance indicators showed a sharp improvement from worst quartile in 2000/01 to above median in 2001/02. For 2003/04 the council's own figures (subject to formal audit) showed that the council determined 48 per cent of major applications within 13 weeks, against a target of 54 per cent; 59 per cent of minor applications in eight weeks, against a target of 50 per cent, and 80 per cent of other applications in eight weeks, against a target of 70 per cent.
- 172 The council has an effective approach to addressing issues in its most deprived wards through two community action zones. The Greenhill community action zone enhances the local street scene and public open space provision by encouraging close links with partner agencies. A neighbourhood warden was appointed in Greenhill in 2001 and a community shop was opened in 2003 which has provided a focal point for the community and reduced social exclusion. A second community action zone has now been established in Ashby.
- 173 The council takes steps to promote more sustainable travel. A Sustrans cycling network plan is in development linking to the National Forest access strategy and involving the county and parish councils. Sustainable travel plans have been integrated in a number of development proposals, with some new developments required to reflect the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. These measures provide clear benefits for the environment from reduced car usage.
- 174 There are clear procedures for the public to report maintenance issues. The website provides telephone numbers and email contact addresses for the council's services and there are arrangements for out-of-hours emergencies. The council has plans to extend the reporting of maintenance issues to include electronic reporting.

- 175 The council takes steps to ensure the local environment is well maintained, although there are weaknesses in its approach to enforcement reflected by the enforcement concordat for better regulation not having been formally adopted. It operates a planned maintenance programme for all council owned open space. It has a contaminated land strategy and advises developers on remediation requirements and clean ups. Air quality has been assessed and four of six air quality management areas are shortly to be revoked, with an additional one likely to be implemented. The council has introduced procedures for reporting noise and nuisance problems and a mediation service is available to help resolve intractable noise problems.
- 176 The council has still to take some steps to support a wider view of environmental issues. European eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS) accreditation has not been achieved. Plans to address this by 2005 are in the corporate plan and a local agenda 21 statement is included in the community strategy. Biodiversity is promoted by forest planting. The council responded to serious flooding two years ago by holding a 'flood fair' in 2003 involving other agencies in proactive flood prevention advice, and set up a community group representing residents' interests and involving other agencies in providing funding to those immediately affected.
- 177 The council's public buildings will not be fully compliant under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 by October 2004. The percentage of council buildings accessible to disabled people was six per cent in 2002/03 which is worst quartile. The council has carried out an assessment of property for DDA purposes, has undertaken staff training, and consults with a local group representing people with mobility difficulties. It has identified funds in the 2004/05 budget for work on its leisure centres to be compliant with DDA. The council is actively addressing access issues for people with wheel chairs and push chairs. However, limited access for the public exposes the council to the risk of legal action.
- 178 The council is not clear about where the local environment needs further improvement and the council's longer term ambitions for the area are uncertain. The council has ceased to prioritise regeneration activity and has closed the former regeneration division.
- 179 The council is progressing town centre developments in Ashby and Coalville. A published strategy for Ashby was produced by consultants but there is a lack of ownership by local people. Overall support for new investment is not well co-ordinated in terms of advice and actions concerning planning, environmental health, highways and sustainability issues.
- 180 People in the northern part of the district feel isolated and that there has been underinvestment and lack of service provision and transport.
- 181 There is no agreed regeneration strategy for the area's continued development and consequently there is a lack of coordinated support for further investment in the district.

Does the council help keep the locality clean?

- 182 There is a high risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.

- 183 The council is responding to the challenge to deal with household waste effectively after a slow start. The council recently prioritised recycling in response to the national agenda and is addressing waste collection issues appropriately. The council is promoting the waste hierarchy principle in its publicity campaign on waste minimisation and recycling. However, audited performance information for 2002/03 shows the amount of waste recycled and volumes of waste collected are in the worst quartile nationally. The effects of comparatively recent prioritisation of recycling are not yet reflected in audited performance indicators.
- 184 The council is addressing its historically poor recycling performance, which has resulted in a marked improvement in 2003/04. Following a best value review of waste management and subsequent inspection of the service (one star, promising) the council provided new funds over four years to expand door-to-door recycling schemes throughout the district with £78,000 in 2001/02, £131,000 in 2002/03, and £410,000 between 2003/04 to 2005/06. However, the action taken has been insufficient to achieve the 2003/4 statutory performance standard. Although the statutory target for 2003/04 was some four per cent more than the council had anticipated, the council came close to meeting the revised target. The council's own figures for 2003/04 (subject to formal audit) show that the recycling rate has increased to 14.3 per cent against a target of 16 per cent.
- 185 The council is on course to meet its statutory recycling target in 2005/06. Whilst the target of 24 per cent by 2005/6 is stretching given the previous base, a range of measures are being put in place to extend kerbside recycling. The council introduced the kerbside collection of dry recyclable materials and garden waste for half of the district in 2003. DEFRA challenge funding of £1.1 million has been awarded which will enable the council to extend dry recycling to the entire district in a phased programme and to expand the range of materials collected. Local bulking facilities are to be developed which will enable the kerbside collection of glass in 2005/06. These measures are likely to be sufficient to enable the 2005/06 recycling target to be met.
- 186 Recycling bring sites are used effectively to collect materials although the range of materials could be extended. Although the distribution of the 44 recycling banks is not ideal, most of the sites have been upgraded since the 2002 inspection of waste management which criticised the facilities. An adopt-a-site scheme was launched in 2002 to help improve recycling sites with input from community groups. Provision of bring sites in the district at 818 per household is significantly better than the county average of 880.
- 187 The council is taking steps to address the growth in the volume of waste collected. The council's measures have included a move to alternate week collections coinciding with introducing kerbside recycling collections and the successful promotion of its 'rethink rubbish' theme to the public. Whilst volume of waste collected remains worst quartile, the council's own figures for 2003/04 (subject to formal audit) show that the volume of waste collected per head was 445 kilograms in 2003/04 as against 460 kilograms in 2002/03.
- 188 The council is successfully promoting its recycling and composting schemes. At a one-day event held in May 2004 918 home composters were sold, with 5,000 units in place to date. Information on the council's web site on waste and recycling is easily accessible. The percentage satisfaction with waste collection of 89 per cent in 2000/01 was best quartile performance. In a recent survey conducted for this inspection, 79 per cent of parish councils agreed that refuse

collection and recycling arrangements are well provided in the local area, with just 21 per cent disagreeing.

- 189 Public satisfaction with standards of cleanliness is deteriorating. Notwithstanding this, the council has introduced additional resources to the street cleaning service and has planned for additional funds in 2004/05. The council is undertaking work with ENCAMS towards the council's monitoring procedures for best value performance indicator 199 to address the public perception of street cleansing. The council's own figures for 2003/04 (subject to formal audit) showed that the percentage of people satisfied with street cleanliness is 49 per cent as against 61 per cent in 2000/01.
- 190 Abandoned vehicles are dealt with promptly. The council has a direct link with the DLVA vehicle database to support prompt action. In a recent survey conducted for this inspection, 71 per cent agreed that abandoned vehicles are cleared away quickly.
- 191 The council contributes effectively to the countywide waste partnership and waste management strategy. Currently, however, this does not contain detailed plans for waste disposal or firm targets beyond 2006 which is a serious weakness. Although the council can meet statutory recycling targets up to 2005/06 it has not, in common with most other Leicestershire districts, agreed infrastructure with the county for further development of recycling after this date, or engaged the major partner in planning for future action on waste management.
- 192 The council is not using enforcement action effectively to keep its public spaces clean and free from litter. The duties of the neighbourhood warden in Greenhill include the cleanliness of public places and this represents a local success against the general trend. In 2003 the council considered, but rejected the more widespread introduction of litter wardens. A fast response unit has been in place since 2001 which enables fly-tips to be removed quickly, and CCTV systems are operated in the two main town centres. However, the district has experienced a general increase in the amount of fly-tipping. There are also persistent problems with littering on privately owned land, for example the Coalville railway embankment. In spite of serving an untidy land notice on network rail the recurring littering persists.

Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?

- 193 There is a low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.
- 194 The council is making an effective contribution to the partnership in safer communities (crime and disorder reduction partnership). The executive portfolio holder for strong, safe communities chairs the partnership. The council took a lead role in setting up the partnership in safer communities several years before the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This demonstrates community leadership, with member and officer ownership of the strategy.
- 195 The crime and disorder reduction strategy 2002–2005 has clear links with the community strategy. The partnership in safer communities and the police are members of the local strategic partnership and the community strategy includes the implementation of the crime and disorder reduction strategy (CDRS) within its aims. The CDRS identifies six strategic aims for the district. The council is leading on burglary and vehicle crime, based on priorities identified by the public

which also reflect county and national priorities. The crime and disorder reduction strategy is linked to the communities against drugs strategy developed in 2001 which has resulted in a joint partnership group with Charnwood. These complementary strategies provide effective support for partnership working on community safety issues.

- 196 The council participates in a number of initiatives to address crime and the fear of crime. The council leads the CCTV operations group which manages the system in Coalville and Ashby. This has resulted in an increased number of successful prosecutions and in Coalville town centre crime incidents in January 2004 decreased by 25 per cent against January 2003. A mobile CCTV pilot is operated jointly with Charnwood. Other successful initiatives include 'grief driving' which is a regionally recognised initiative to educate the public about the consequences of poor driving, and the domestic violence review panel, aimed at local people feeling more secure.
- 197 Key partners have been effectively engaged and partnership initiatives are leading to demonstrable improvements. National burglary and vehicle crime targets are on course. Theft of vehicles exceeded its targeted reduction in 2002/03 (although unaudited figures in 2003/04 show an increase) whilst thefts from vehicles showed a slight reduction in 2003/04 (unaudited). Although there is no pooled budget, the council through the CDRP makes significant joint use of resources with external funding and sponsorship. A problem solving approach to burglary reduction succeeded in reducing the number of burglaries by 21.6 per cent against a targeted reduction of 3 per cent in the first community safety strategy 1999-2001. The Neighbourhood Warden in Greenhill is now jointly sponsored by the private sector. Greenhill has seen a 24 per cent overall reduction in crime in 18 months. Crime levels generally are not rising relatively to other areas nationally or for the family of CDRPs.
- 198 The council has not mainstreamed community safety to all of its services. The council has not reviewed all of its activities to ensure crime and disorder issues are systematically addressed in order to meet section 17 duties. However, the council demonstrates ownership of the crime and disorder strategy and crime reduction is being addressed by some services, particularly housing and leisure. Designing out crime is addressed in pre-application discussions with developers. The internal mainstreaming of community safety issues across service areas has started to be facilitated by work on anti-social behaviour but this currently lacks internal co-ordination. This limits the effectiveness of learning from successful community safety initiatives and risks some schemes being undervalued and consequently being subject to closure from budget pressures.
- 199 The council does not have a planned strategic approach to media management of community safety. Although overall levels of crime are low and continuing to reduce, the fear of crime has not followed this trend. Community safety initiatives and successes are not sufficiently understood or appreciated by the general public and consequently the fear of crime has not reduced.
- 200 Performance management is a major area of weakness in monitoring the CDRP action plan. The strategy contains action plans and targets related to each strategic aim although monitoring and performance management are not undertaken robustly. Performance indicators are not clearly specified or aligned to objectives and targets. The partnership does not use performance information effectively to identify key actions not achieving their targets or contributing to the

strategic aims. The rationale for community safety activity is not clearly defined or regularly reviewed to check it remains relevant.

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

- 201 There is a low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.
- 202 The council has a clear idea of the needs of local children and young people. A survey of all year seven and year nine young people in the district was conducted in 2001 to inform the development of sports and other activities for young people, and this was repeated in 2004. A play day consultation event for under-twelve's was held in October 2003. The picnic in the park consultation event included a youth zone attended by 500 young people. A youth council has been established and two members attend the policy review and development board. These methods have enabled the council to assess participation and attitudes of children and young people to sport, leisure and arts and provide baseline data for future planning.
- 203 The council is working effectively in partnership to deliver activities for young people. The council is recognised by the county as a good partner for its youth work and the local strategic partnership has identified activities for young people as a key priority. Successful partnerships are varied but include the active sports partnership and the youth action panel and events include street sport, and junior citizen, a safety event involving all 850 year six pupils. Dual-use partnership arrangements are in place with Ibstock and Castle Donington community colleges.
- 204 The council is aware of what to provide itself and where activities are more appropriately delivered through others. Activities are directly provided through leisure centre programmes including after-school and holiday events. Street dance features on the British Heart Foundation website as a national case study. Four skate parks are now in place in the district in which young people were involved in the design. Services provided by enabling others include the Buy A Sports Leader scheme, leisure bus hire and tumble tots activities for the very young. The partnership youth games encourage non participants to be involved and 175 children took part last year. An arts directory produced by the council includes a wide range of cultural activities involving young people and is distributed free of charge. Facilities are provided which address the range of young people's needs although there is limited access to facilities for young people in the north of the district.
- 205 The council successfully promotes activities for young people to encourage take up and supports its partners in promoting activities. For example, the council leads in promoting the SPLASH event which is jointly sponsored with the Police and 8916 visits by young people were recorded in summer 2003. This event is now in its seventh year. Leisure staff visit schools to provide taster sessions. Leaflets about activities for young people are distributed regularly to 26,000 local homes. The council's website includes a dedicated youth area and a sports club directory lists 106 local sports clubs including more than half with junior sections. High and sustained attendance figures demonstrate that the sporting needs of young people are being met.

- 206 The council provides appropriately for difficult to reach young people. The positive futures joint partnership scheme takes referrals of the top 50 most at risk young people. Attendance records at schools and educational attainment has improved. Positive futures was recently chosen as a regional case study for the East Midlands. The leisure links concessionary access scheme offers free and half price swimming to qualifying young people.
- 207 The council has an adequate child protection policy. All staff are CRB checked if involved with children and all staff have attended child protection training. Volunteers are supported in obtaining CRB checks and receive training and holiday casual staff are checked and trained. For clubs hiring facilities, CRB checks are a condition of hire. The council is taking sufficient and appropriate steps to protect children in its care.
- 208 The council is not providing quality play areas for children and there are gaps for inclusive play and play areas for over-elevens. The council had no playgrounds or play areas which conform to national standards. A scrutiny task and finish group has reviewed this and a play strategy for the district is in development which will cover outdoor and indoor play for children up to 16 years.

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"> • Major regeneration of former coalfields • Support for National Forest • Town centre developments • Comprehensive supplementary planning guidance and Section 106 agreements working well • Improved planning PIs • Two Community Action Zones • Promoting sustainable travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No current regeneration strategy • Northern part of district isolated from service provision and transport • Not achieved DDA compliance although planned • Enforcement Concordat not formally adopted • EMAS accreditation not yet achieved although in corporate plan
Does the council help keep the locality clean?	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycling and waste management services a priority investment • Rethink Rubbish theme • Recycling rate doubled in last year (unaudited) • Likely to achieve 2005/06 statutory recycling target • Secured DEFRA funding to extend kerbside recycling • Promotion of home composting • Bring sites recently upgraded • Effective contributor to county waste partnership • Best value waste management 1 star promising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failed to achieve statutory recycling target for 2003/04 • Volume of waste collected in worst quartile but recent improvement (unaudited) • Lack of progress with County strategy beyond 2006 • Customer satisfaction with street cleansing deteriorating • No effective enforcement action
Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSP interfaces with LSP • Council lead on priorities identified by public • Proactive partnership work on CCTV • Specific initiatives e.g. Grief Driving • Crime contained or decreasing • Crime not rising relative to other CDRPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDRP action plan not robustly monitored • Section 17 audits not completed for all services • Fear of crime not reducing
Does the council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective consultation with young people • Addressing needs of hard to reach young people • Concessionary access and promotional schemes • Positive futures scheme regional case study • Skate parks involved young people in design • Street dance national case study • CRB checks and child protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of quality play areas for children although plan in development • Limited access to facilities for young people in north of district

Area of focus	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Public space diagnostic assessment judgement		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

209 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	3	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	3	Ethical framework Governance arrangements Treasury management Prevention and detection of fraud and corruption
Financial statements	3	Timeliness Quality Supporting records
Legality of significant financial transactions	2	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

210 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

211 Overall, we found that North West Leicestershire District Council's benefits service was providing a Fair towards Good performance. North West Leicestershire District Council's current performance demonstrates a number of strengths. These include:

- ◆ a performance management framework that provides assurance to members and senior officers that the benefits service is working towards the council's strategic objectives;
- ◆ consistent top quartile performance in processing claims and dealing with changes of circumstances;
- ◆ top quartile performance for customer satisfaction as measured by two best value performance indicator user satisfaction surveys undertaken in 2000/01 and 2003/04;
- ◆ use of one claim form for all HB and CTB applications;
- ◆ compliance with the Department for Work and Pensions' (the department) verification framework;
- ◆ 10 per cent management checking arrangements in place;
- ◆ controls and procedures relating to the assessment and payment of benefit are of a high standard; and
- ◆ an increasing level of sanctions.

212 However, there are some areas where North West Leicestershire District Council needs to develop further to fully meet the BFI and the department's performance standards framework. These include:

- ◆ introducing the 'do not redirect' scheme;
- ◆ amending its prosecution policy to include the financial criteria it will use when applying sanctions;
- ◆ defining a strategy for continuous improvement in reducing the level and age of debt; and
- ◆ introducing targets for customer services in line with performance standards.

Proven capacity to improve

- 213 We assessed North West Leicestershire District Council's proven capacity to improve as Fair towards Good. North West Leicestershire District Council is able to demonstrate the following positive aspects:
- ◆ conducting a best value review of the benefits service in 2001;
 - ◆ reorganising the benefits service in November 2003 to seek improvements in service delivery;
 - ◆ carrying out a self-assessment using performance standards in November 2003;
 - ◆ a vision for the benefits service in the form of a clear statement of intent to meet or exceed performance standards; and
 - ◆ the setting of targets and use of performance monitoring to measure success against strategic objectives.
- 214 However, the following areas led us to question the extent to which North West Leicestershire District Council is able to demonstrate its capacity to improve:
- ◆ the vision for the benefits service not being translated into a detailed plan for continuous improvement over a 3 or 5-year period;
 - ◆ the absence of a strategy for continuous improvement in the level and age of outstanding debt;
 - ◆ the staff appraisal system adopted by the council does not require individual targets to be set in line with the council's strategic objectives and service delivery plans;
 - ◆ the absence of an annual business plan for counter-fraud activity;
 - ◆ targets for personal and telephone callers in line with performance standards had not been set; and
 - ◆ the absence of a service level agreement with Jobcentre Plus.
- 215 We would like to thank North West Leicestershire District Council staff, particularly the Head of Housing Benefits, for their assistance and co-operation with the assessment process.
- 216 This report has been produced pursuant to powers contained in sections 10 and 11 of the Local Government Act 1999.

Appendix 5 – Framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment

- 217 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.
- 218 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;
 - ◆ progress in meeting the decent homes standard;
 - ◆ 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.
- 219 The assessment for North West Leicestershire was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 10th to 14th May.
- 220 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.