

# Corporate Assessment

**Wychavon District Council**

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

### **Copies of this report**

If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call 0845 056 0566.

© Audit Commission 2007

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

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

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

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Areas for improvement</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Summary of assessment scores</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>8</b>
The locality	8
The Council	9
<b>What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?</b>	<b>10</b>
Ambition	10
Prioritisation	11
<b>What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?</b>	<b>14</b>
Capacity	14
Performance management	17
<b>What has been achieved?</b>	<b>20</b>
Achievement and Improvement	20
<b>Appendix 1 - Framework for Corporate Assessment</b>	<b>23</b>

## Introduction

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

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement and Improvement

## Executive summary

- 3 Wychavon District Council has made good progress in key areas since the last Corporate Assessment in 2003 and is now an excellent council that is performing strongly.
- 4 The Council has set clear ambitions and priorities for the area and is demonstrating strong community leadership. It has set out its vision for the area and based its three priorities and 15 goals on what the community have told the Council is important to them. However, these ambitions are not supported by clear and challenging targets and the Council's performance management system does not enable the Council to measure what impact it is having, or to what extent it has achieved its goals.
- 5 The Council has used partnership working very effectively both to inform its understanding of local needs and in delivering initiatives and projects. It has built strong working partnerships in the area which are beginning to have an impact on local quality of life.
- 6 Wychavon District Council is characterised by strong political and managerial leadership with politicians setting the overall direction and the managerial leadership guiding and implementing the strategic focus. Decision making and scrutiny arrangements support service delivery and improvement. However, some aspects of organisational development need improvement to ensure that the Council is equipped for future challenges.
- 7 The Council has a sound financial position with strong financial management. Councillors have a good understanding of financial issues and the Council has taken steps to improve forecasting and budgeting. It is maintaining good levels of reserves. This strong financial position means that the Council has in the past had sufficient resources to carry out its plans and enabled it to take an innovative and creative approach to meeting locally identified needs, for example by funding the building of a hospital and supermarket. It is well placed to maintain this strong financial position.
- 8 Services are generally of a high quality and there is evidence of a sustained improvement over time. For example there have been significant improvements in housing, environmental services and planning over the past three years. Local people have indicated that they are generally very satisfied with council services. The most recent satisfaction data available shows that satisfaction rates for all services except waste collection have improved. However, it is less clear what progress the Council has made towards achieving its goals because it has not established a clear baseline position and set specific and challenging targets against which achievement could be measured.

## Areas for improvement

- 9 The Council should invest in developing clear outcome measures and targets for each of its goals and strengthen its promises by ensuring that they are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced and Time bound).
- 10 The Council should develop a comprehensive approach to developing the skills and capacity of its councillors. It should develop a clear organisational development strategy to ensure that the organisation of the future is fit for purpose.
- 11 The Council should develop a more strategic approach to diversity and equality and build on the good work that has been undertaken to understand the needs of migrant workers and the gypsy and traveller community. The Council should step up the pace of carrying out impact assessments to enable it to work towards Level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard. It should broaden its diversity strategy to include actions to address issues such as age, gender, sexuality and community cohesion.

## Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*	Weighted score
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	4	8
	Prioritisation	3	6
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3	6
	Performance management	2	4
What has been achieved?	Achievement and Improvement	3	21
<b>Weighted score</b>			<b>45</b>
<b>CPA category</b>			<b>Excellent</b>

### \*Key to scores

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

### \*\*Banding thresholds for determining CPA category

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

## Context

### The locality

- 12 Wychavon District Council is located in the County of Worcestershire in the West Midlands region of England. Around half of the population of 116,900 live in the three main towns of Droitwich Spa, Evesham and Pershore and the remaining half live in small rural villages and settlements. The area has a strong focus on horticulture, particularly in the Vale of Evesham. The southern part of the District falls within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 13 There are over 50,000 homes in Wychavon, of which 76 per cent are owned outright. This is above the national average. House prices are higher than average for England and Wales and there is a significant annual shortfall in the availability of affordable housing.
- 14 Unemployment, at 1.5 per cent, is significantly below regional and national averages but the gross weekly pay of workers living in the area is lower than regional and national averages at £322 per week (Source ASHE). Key employers in the area include manufacturing, hotels and restaurants, agriculture and food distribution and the public sector. The Council is one of the larger employers in the area. In recent years there has been a significant rise in the local migrant worker population as a result of agriculture and food processing employers targeting recruitment at Eastern Europe and South African workers.
- 15 Nearly 60 per cent of the population falls into the 20-64 age group with 22.8 per cent aged under 19 years and 18.5 per cent are 65 or over. This represents a higher than average number of elderly people and trends show an ageing population. The Census figures show that 1.2 per cent of the population consider themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority. There has been a significant increase in the number of Polish residents. The Council also acknowledges its largest minority group consists of Gypsies and Travellers who account for around 0.7 per cent of the population (estimated figure based on the most recent bi-annual count of Gypsy caravans).
- 16 Overall poverty in the area is low. The district's overall ranking on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation is 272 out of 354 (where 1 is the most deprived) but there are pockets of deprivation in some parts of the district such as the Westlands area of Droitwich Spa. There are also issues of rural isolation and poor access to services in some areas.
- 17 Crime levels are amongst the lowest in the country and generally improving. The Council's surveys show that community safety issues remain a high priority for residents suggesting a disproportionate fear of crime when compared to actual crime rates. However, the latest results show that fear of crime is reducing and people feel safer.

- 18 The health of Wychavon residents is generally good. However, Department of Health research suggests that a quarter of adults in the district are obese and that the percentage of people with diabetes is higher than the national average.

## The Council

- 19 Wychavon District Council has adopted a cabinet style of governance since 2002. There are 45 Councillors representing 32 wards. At the time of the inspection the Conservative Group controlled the Council with 31 seats, the Liberal Democrats have 12 seats and Labour have 2. The Leader of the Council chairs the Executive Board which includes five Councillors with specific responsibilities for; Community Partnership, Environment, Housing and Health, Planning Policy, Rural Affairs and Diversity and Resources. The Election on 3 May did not affect the political control of the Council which now stands at 35 Conservatives and 10 Liberal Democrats.
- 20 The Council has an Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review and challenge the Board's decisions and has set up scrutiny teams to look at specific issues. There are also Development Control, Development Control (policy), Licensing and Standards Committees.
- 21 The Council employs 340 full time equivalent staff. There is a Managing Director and eight Heads of Service which comprise the Senior Management Team (SMT).
- 22 Following a voluntary stock transfer in October 1994 Wychavon no longer has responsibility for the provision of social housing in the area. The Council continues to take a strategic housing role. In 1999 the Council transferred the operation and management of its three leisure centres to Wychavon Leisure Community Association Ltd, a not for profit charitable trust. The Council has contracted out its refuse collection, street cleaning and grounds maintenance services.
- 23 The Council has one of the lowest district council tax levels in the country and has held increases to 2.5 per cent for the last eight years. The district council levy for a Band D property is £101.26 for 2007/08.
- 24 The Council's annual revenue budget for 2006/07 was around £14 million and the capital budget for 2006/07 was £10 million.
- 25 Wychavon was assessed as 'good' in its last CPA report which was published in March 2004. In April 2005 its Housing service was assessed as 'excellent' with 'excellent' prospects for improvement; the only Council in the country to achieve this rating. The Council received the maximum score of 4 for its Use of Resources in 2007, one of only seven Councils in the country to receive this rating.

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

### Ambition

- 26 The Council is performing strongly in this area. It has a clear strategic vision for the area and ambitions which are shared and understood by partners. It is effective in its community leadership role and has a strong approach to working in partnership to deliver its ambitions. It has a good grasp of the demographic, economic and environmental characteristics of the area. Communication with the local community and stakeholders is effective.
- 27 Wychavon's vision and ambitions are clear and understood by staff, partners and the local community. The vision is of 'healthy, safe and diverse communities living in a clean and green environment'. Its aim is 'to deliver excellent services and work with partners to improve quality of life for everyone'. Its aspirations are largely in line with those of county wide partners and provide a clear sense of direction for the community. Local partners understand the Council's ambitions and the role of partners in delivering the ambitions are made clear. A new Community Plan for 2007-2010 is currently being developed which is structured around the themes in the County Local Area Agreement. This will give greater clarity of purpose and more effective alignment of priorities than is currently the case. The Council also has a good process for ensuring managers influence corporate planning, prioritisation and processes. Involving partners and staff in developing ambitions means that the Council is well placed to deliver its priorities because partners and staff are committed towards achieving the same goals.
- 28 The Council has engaged well with local people using a range of effective methods. It produces a variety of publications, undertakes targeted consultation activities and focus groups to help it find out the views of local people as well as communicating its priorities to them. A recent MORI poll found that most residents feel that the Council keeps them well informed. The Council is confident in its leadership and has a clear corporate identity which is reinforced through branding of literature and effective public relations and marketing. It commissions research to identify local priorities. This means that local people have a voice in setting ambitions for the area and understand how priorities are set.
- 29 The Council has a good understanding of the scale of the social, economic and environmental characteristics of the area, particularly in relation to diversity and inclusion. For example it has undertaken studies into the needs of gypsy and traveller communities and migrant workers to inform its plans. The Council has developed action plans to address issues arising from these studies.

- 30 The Council is effective in carrying out its community leadership role. It is proactive in helping to shape regional and sub regional policies and practices as well as delivering on the ground for local people. The approach to migrant workers and broadband in rural areas has helped to influence regional policies and practices. The Council is taking a leading role in shaping South Worcestershire's approach to regional planning by working with neighbouring councils and it works well with partners on community safety issues. This means that the Council is recognised as a key player in regional and sub-regional issues and well placed to maximise opportunities and benefits for local communities.
- 31 The Council is effective at building strong relationships with partners. It has built up trust in its relationships with partners by having a good track record of challenging partners' policy choices as well as making pragmatic decisions to benefit local people. For example, when the Primary Care Trust (PCT) decided to close Pershore Cottage Hospital Council due to financial constraints the Council initially challenged the decision and then having explored the options with the PCT and other health partners invested its own capital resources in a new 26 bed community hospital. This approach to partnership means that the Council is in a good position to attract additional resources and achieve greater impact.

## Prioritisation

- 32 The Council is performing well in this area. It has clear priorities that are based on local need and consultation. The Council knows what matters most for local people. It allocates resources in line with its priorities. Priorities take account of the needs of minority groups or those at risk of disadvantage but this is not always explicit or embedded in plans. The Council intends to ensure that there is consistency between its own plans and sub regional and county wide plans such as the Local Area Agreement but this is not yet in place. The Council's approach to delivering its priorities is weakened by some actions plans which are not robust.
- 33 The Council knows what matters most for local people and has set out its priorities accordingly. It is clear and consistent about its priorities. The Council's priorities are:
- healthy and safe communities with a good quality environment;
  - reaching out to everyone; and
  - an excellently run Council.

These priorities are translated through the Council's five year strategy into five year goals and annual 'promises'. It gathers information from a wide variety of sources including its own research and that of partners. It uses this information to make decisions about priorities and resources. This means that councillors, staff and local people understand the Council's priorities.

## 12 Corporate Assessment | What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 34 The Council takes adequate account of the needs of most sections of the community in setting its priorities and in the design and delivery of services. It is making progress on completing equality impact assessments and is doing some monitoring of take up of services by particular sections of the community. However, this approach is not embedded and the Council does not set targets to address under-representation of certain groups. There are some gaps at a strategic level in addressing the needs of minority groups or those at risk of disadvantage. There are a number of goals and promises around the needs, for example, of young people, gypsies and travellers, and those living in rural areas, but these needs are not always reflected in strategic documents such as the Community Safety Strategy or Diversity Strategy.
- 35 The Council allocates its revenue resources in line with priorities but the process for making strategic choices around capital projects is less clear. The Council does not have financial pressures and there are few instances where the Council has had to make difficult choices or disinvest in one area so that it can increase its investment elsewhere. As a result, there is little clarity about which things are not a priority, or less of a priority, and why.
- 36 There are gaps in the Council's strategic framework to deliver its priorities. It has a one page corporate strategy which is commendable in its simplicity but is under-developed in that it is not supported by robust action plans or sufficiently linked to other key plans such as the Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement. There is a lack of clear and agreed targets for improvement.
- 37 There is an adequate framework in place for ensuring that priorities are cascaded down to individual staff through Service Delivery Plans and Personal Development Reviews (PDRs). Senior managers are held to account through a process of 'pinning down' performance against corporate goals. However, there is no accurate or comprehensive means of evaluating the impact of PDRs, although it is clear that a very high proportion of staff receive them. This means that it is difficult for the Council to ensure that its priorities are cascaded in a systematic and comprehensive way and that all individuals are held to account for their performance.
- 38 The Council's service delivery plans have not in the past provided sufficient direction or clarity of purpose. The most recent plans show a marked improvement with a greater emphasis on value for money but there is still room for improvement. There are some links to corporate priorities, but these are not adequate for the purposes of monitoring and reporting. The plans are focussed on activity and outputs, with very few, if any, outcomes or success measures. More use could be made of cost comparisons, targets for efficiencies and benchmarking information to focus service improvement. There is some good reference to consultation activity and a clear commitment to service standards but there is no indication of how service standards will be measured. Stronger service plans would enable the Council to measure the impact it is having on improving the outcomes and quality of life for local residents.

- 39** There are, however, some good strategies and plans; The South Worcestershire Community Safety Strategy has good, clear strategic aims. It also contains some useful detail and information on specific projects. The project plans have some good aspects - cost implications, outputs, outcomes and lead responsibilities; The Homelessness Strategy has three clear objectives and a focus on partnership working. The document shows a good understanding of the various aspects of homelessness and the desired outcomes.

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

### Capacity

- 40 The Council is performing well in this area. There is strong political and managerial leadership and the Council is enhancing its capacity through partnership working and outsourcing. The Council has taken an innovative and creative approach to meeting local needs aided by strong financial capacity and an effective approach to risk management. Councillors are engaging well with the political process of scrutiny and challenge and decision making is improving as a result. The Council does not have a comprehensive approach to developing the skills and capacity of councillors and staff. The Council's approach to equality and diversity issues is good.
- 41 Political and managerial leadership is strong. The roles and responsibilities of officers and councillors are clear and decision making processes are transparent. Working relationships between councillors and officers are strong and there is a healthy degree of mutual respect, openness and challenge. For example, the Scrutiny team looking at waste and recycling challenged current methods of service delivery resulting in a decision to renegotiate the contract with more emphasis on recycling. Clarity of roles and responsibilities enables councillors and officers to work together constructively for the benefit of the Council and is the basis for providing effective leadership.
- 42 The Council has an effective approach to risk management. It takes steps to understand key risks and ensure that risks are managed well through strategic planning. The Council is not risk averse. For example, it has assessed the risks associated with its decision to refurbish Droitwich Lido carefully and put in place actions to mitigate against risks, such as transferring most of the risk to Wychavon Leisure. Members of the Executive Board are appraised of the nature of those risks and kept up to date. This means that the Council is taking steps to avoid exposing the Council to unacceptable levels of risk and that councillors can make informed decisions.

- 43 Appropriate scrutiny arrangements are in place which allow scrutiny to be rigorous and challenging. Non executive members including those from opposition groups form the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and receive appropriate support from officers. The impact of scrutiny work is not consistently measured, but there is some evidence that the outcomes of scrutiny reviews contribute to service improvement. Scrutiny has proved an effective way of engaging local communities in a public debate. For example the Council has held public scrutiny sessions around health issues and has begun to improve its approach to communicating the outcome of reviews. This means that local people are more easily able to recognise the outcomes of work they have taken part in and may feel more engaged with the decision making process as a result.
- 44 The Council has a strong and robust approach to ensuring ethical standards. The Standards Committee has an independent chair who actively works to promote and maintain high standards of conduct through training, information and awareness and to assess the impact of new developments nationally. This means that the Committee is in a good position to identify and act on potential problems and to assess training and information needs.
- 45 Wychavon is recognised by partners as playing a significant role in bringing them together to achieve improvements to services. There is a developing strategic alliance between the three South Worcestershire districts which is largely driven by Wychavon. There are a number of joint initiatives such as the concessionary travel scheme and planned Revenues and Benefits Shared Services project. The districts have also worked together to establish a joint Planning Board to address the implications of the Regional Spatial Strategy, particularly around housing growth issues. Many of these initiatives are at too early a stage to demonstrate improvements to services. The LSP structure has strengthened the Council's ability to work in partnership at a local level to deliver projects and activities. It means that the Council is well placed to enhance community engagement and to address local needs. The Council works well with its three LSPs to identify actions and projects which are aimed at benefiting the local community and is beginning to make much more explicit links between the activities of partnerships and its goals. The Council is strong in providing support to these LSPs, both financially and in other ways, to assist in the successful implementation of these actions and projects.
- 46 The Council has been successful in finding innovative ways of providing services for local people. For example, the Council worked with Waitrose to provide a new supermarket aimed at addressing the decline of Droitwich town centre. The Council invested its own resources to purchase land and support construction costs and then leased the facility back to the providers resulting in a return on the Council's investment of 7.4 per cent.

**16 Corporate Assessment | What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?**

- 47** Financial management is effective. Councillors have a good understanding of the financial position of the Council and the Council has taken steps to ensure that budgeting and forecasting is more accurate. The draft budget is scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee although in reality the debate is fairly limited. It is maintaining good levels of reserves. However, it is also aware of the possible implications of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review which could mean reduced grants and a subsequent pressure on resources. This may result in councillors having to make difficult decisions about areas for investment or disinvestment.
- 48** The Council effectively manages and monitors its capital and assets to ensure delivery of its strategic priorities and continuous improvement in its performance. The Council is clear about its current performance and future priorities and has appropriate monitoring arrangements in place to ensure it continues to deliver and improve. The Council has a significant capital programme which includes forecasts for three years and beyond and an annual process of considering options against priority areas. The Council is well placed to ensure that its capital programme supports its priorities.
- 49** The Council has an open approach to procurement and a track record of outsourcing services. It is currently working with neighbouring councils to investigate options for sharing services and has a range of partnership arrangements in place. The recently adopted procurement strategy has clear objectives but could be improved with the addition of measurable targets and outcomes. The Council has not regularly exposed many of its key service contracts to market testing or investigated alternative options, such as shadow bids, where it feels that full re-tendering would be not cost effective. However, it is currently in the process of inviting bids for its refuse contract as a result of challenge from an Overview and Scrutiny team. It cannot demonstrate that it is using procurement systematically to drive service improvement or improve value for money.
- 50** The Council does not have a comprehensive and robust organisational development strategy. Whilst there is a significant amount of training available for councillors and many councillors are keen on learning from best practice, there is no coherent and agreed approach to developing councillors' skills and knowledge. In contrast, the Council has a good process for the identification and meeting of individual training needs for managers and staff. The Council's new Human Resources strategy, *Prouder People*, is not sufficiently robust to effectively shape and drive organisational development. There are no measurable targets or outcomes and at the time of the inspection a draft action plan was under development but not yet agreed. Improving its approach to organisational development will enable the Council to ensure that the Council is fit for purpose and has the right skills mix to meet future challenges.

- 51 The Council is performing well in its approach to diversity. It is currently at Level 2 of the local government equality standard. Around a third of district councils are currently at the same level and less than a fifth are at Level 3 or above. There are some good examples where it has successfully challenged local attitudes towards groups such as migrant workers and gypsies and travellers. And it has undertaken innovative training and development approaches to confront prejudice. Wychavon's 'Reaching Out' programme has been cited as notable practice by the Audit Commission for successfully challenging negative stereotypes through creative approaches. It considers the implications of decisions or actions but this is not yet strategic or integrated fully. It has been successful in working with partners to attract significant regional capacity building funding to progress its performance on equality and diversity.

## Performance management

- 52 The Council is performing adequately in this area. There are sound processes in place for collecting and reporting performance information but the system lacks sophistication. Councillors are involved in managing performance and the Council is open to challenge. However, a fundamental weakness for the Council is that it cannot consistently measure whether it is achieving against its 15 goals, either where it is working on its own or in partnership. Also, the Council's performance management arrangements do not include a process for holding the executive board members to account.
- 53 The Council has an adequate approach to measuring and reporting its performance. It uses performance management software to collect and measure outturns against national and local performance indicators, progress against corporate promises, risk management issues, compliments, comments and complaints, customer satisfaction and the actions carried out by its partnerships. This information is presented in the Council's quarterly 'Signal of Success' reports. In addition the Council reports monthly on a set of priority indicators where performance has not been in line with targets. This measurement process helps the Council understand whether it meeting some of its key performance targets.
- 54 Accountability and challenge at Executive Board level is not supported by the performance management system. The Council does not report performance against either the executive board's areas of responsibility, or those of SMT members. SMT members are allocated responsibility for specific promises, progress against which is reported, but there is no overall report on how their individual service areas are performing. However, performance is robustly challenged by councillors at Executive Board and Performance Monitoring Scrutiny Team meetings but accountability is weakened by the current approach.

**18 Corporate Assessment | What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?**

- 55** The Council has a generally good overall approach to incorporating feedback from service users into performance management arrangements. It regularly reports on performance and activity via its various newsletters, magazines and annual reports. The Council has a strong approach to using customer satisfaction indicators to measure success and uses a range of consultation techniques to capture the views of local people, particularly those who generally do not respond to surveys, such as the gypsy and traveller community.
- 56** The Council's approach to involving non executive councillors in the assessment of performance is good. The minutes from the Performance Scrutiny Monitoring Team demonstrate a good level of discussion, scrutiny and challenge by members on a range of performance issues including recycling, complaints, sickness levels and abandoned vehicles.
- 57** The Council has a good approach to using its performance information to develop learning and further improvement. In recent years the Council has put itself forward for a large number of external awards such as LGC Council of the Year (joint winner in March 2007) and 'Loo of the Year' but also through accreditation such as Chartermark, ISO9000 and Green Flag. Many of these awards rely on accurate performance information and regular monitoring of standards. The Council challenges itself to build on areas of strength as well as tackling areas for improvement.
- 58** On a broader, more corporate level, the Council does not have an overall framework for assessing progress against its 15 goals, which are grouped under its three priorities. These goals act as the Council's outcome aspirations and most, but not all, are clear expressions of improvements that the Council wants to see in the district. Attached to each goal is a small number of promises which are expressed in the form of outputs, and the Council also links a small basket of performance indicators to each priority. However, there is no consistent framework of success measures linked to these goals. This is a significant weakness in the Council's performance management arrangements as, although the Council is able to record the completion of activity, it cannot provide an assessment of what impact this activity is having on meeting its goals. Consequently the Council is not able to demonstrate achievement in many priority areas.
- 59** There are some weaknesses in the Council's approach to holding partners to account for performance. As with its own goals, there is no systematic process for setting outcomes and success measures for much of the Council's partnership working. This means that the Council is unable to demonstrate whether its partnership activity is assisting in the achievement of its desired outcomes.

- 60 The Council has an inconsistent approach to holding contractors formally to account for delivering service improvement. In some areas there are clear targets based on the council's goals but in other areas targets are mainly financially driven. For example, the Parks contract includes reference to achieving and maintaining Green Flag status which is a target for 2007/08. Whilst the inclusion of clear targets for improvement is not explicit in many contracts it is clear that contracts are monitored by the Council and that there is a good relationship between client and contractor based on mutual trust and commitment to providing quality services. Contractors understand the council's priorities and are engaged to differing degrees in discussions with the Council about future plans.
- 61 The Council responds well to external criticism and learns from best practice but there is no structured or systematic approach to embedding learning across the whole of the organisation. This means that opportunities to share learning may be lost.

## What has been achieved?

### Achievement and Improvement

- 62 The Council is performing well in this area. Its level of achievement is generally very strong in areas measured by national performance indicators, but it is not clear whether it is achieving the same level of success in its wider objectives. This means that the Council cannot always measure what impact its activities are having on improving the quality of life for local people.
- 63 Overall, Council services are performing strongly. Fifty six per cent of the Council's Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) are in the best performing category when compared with other councils and only 6 per cent are in the worst performing category. Seventy six per cent of BVPIs are improving.
- 64 The Council's achievements and improvement against its goals have been set out below grouped under the Council's three main priorities. Overall, the Council cannot demonstrate that it is achieving outcomes for nine of the 15 goals that sit under the three priorities.

### Healthy and safe communities with a good quality environment

- 65 Performance against this priority is mixed. The Council can demonstrate that it has had an impact on reducing crime and fear of crime and some success on improving recycling rates and reducing waste. Leisure facilities are of a consistently good quality and the numbers of local people taking part in active sport and recreation is above the regional average according to data supplied by the Sport England Active People Survey. However, performance on building new homes on brown field sites has deteriorated and is now below the average compared to other councils. The Council has taken a strategic decision not to collect green waste and focus on minimising waste. As a result it recycles less waste than most other councils and performance is currently amongst the worst performing category. But in terms of kilograms of waste collected it is amongst the best performing councils.
- 66 The Council has not set clear success measures for many of the goals contained within this priority and cannot therefore demonstrate the scale of its impact. For example:
- the Council finds it difficult to demonstrate the impact that it has had on improving people's health. It has created better local health facilities in Pershore but is unable to measure the extent by which access to healthcare has improved. It has not set clear success measures for its work around underage alcohol sales or agreed how it will monitor its impact on changing attitudes to smoking; and

- the Council cannot demonstrate that its investment in leisure is improving the accessibility of its leisure services for all sections of the community. It has not established baseline information on different groups within the community and does not set targets for the leisure provider to address areas of under representation. There is very limited knowledge about non-users and barriers to use of leisure facilities.

### Reaching out to everyone

- 67 Performance against this priority is mixed. The Council can demonstrate achievements against some of its goals under this priority. For example it has improved housing services, built more affordable homes and increased activities and facilities for children and young people. These investments have led to demonstrable outcomes in some areas. For example, surveys show that more residents than previously agreed that Wychavon was a place where people from different backgrounds got on well and that facilities for children and teenagers had got better.
- 68 The Council has significantly improved its performance on housing. From a relatively weak performance previously the Council improved its strategic housing service to achieve an inspection score of excellent, three-star service with excellent prospects for improvement. Over 30 per cent of all new homes built are affordable units and it is amongst the best performing councils for returning vacant private sector dwellings into occupation. It has also taken an innovative approach to freeing up larger family properties by encouraging people to relocate into more suitable properties and has implemented 'Choice based letting' meaning that tenants have more choice about where they live.
- 69 The Council finds it more difficult to demonstrate achievement against some of its other goals because it has not set clear success measures or established accurate baseline information. For example:
- it is not possible to assess the success or otherwise of the Council's investment in its goal of creating a diverse and thriving economy and regenerating its towns. It has attracted significant external funding through the Market Towns programme which has enabled a range of projects and initiatives to be carried out through the three LSPs. The Council does not routinely report on the impact of these investments although it is required to monitor outputs such as jobs created and jobs safeguarded. Some key projects have been slower to advance due to a range of constraints largely outside the Council's control which has impacted upon the Council's ability to achieve this goal; and
  - It is not clear whether the Council has achieved its goal of meeting transport needs throughout the district, particularly in rural areas. Whilst the Council has taken steps to understand the issues and has introduced free bus passes for over 60s and travel tokens for disabled people and those over 80, it has not monitored usage or take up of schemes. Similarly it provides grants and support to voluntary sector transport schemes but has not evaluated whether these are effective solutions to the problem.

### **An excellently run Council**

- 70** The Council performs strongly with respect to this priority with some areas of very good performance. Service performance and resident satisfaction is high and the Council provides good quality services at a low cost to residents. Communication is effective and residents feel informed about the Council and its services. The Council uses IT effectively to improve access to services; its website is highly rated and it has introduced 'one stop shops' to improve service delivery.
- 71** Levels of customer and resident satisfaction with Council services, have been, and continue to be, high. The results of the 2006 Best Value satisfaction survey show that, of the 15 indicators, the Council is improving its satisfaction score in 12, remaining static in two, and decreasing in just one. Overall satisfaction with the Council has increased to 65 per cent.
- 72** Performance against corporate health indicators is generally strong. The Council has improved its performance on sickness absence though a more effective approach to long term sickness and investing in health and well being. Other actions are also being planned including a review of occupational health. This means that the Council is well placed to maintain its performance in this area.
- 73** The Council performs well with regard to its goal of using its money effectively and efficiently. It has low council tax with a 2.5 per cent increase for the eighth year running and provides good quality services as measured by national PIs. It has exceeded government efficiency targets. Performance on collection of council tax is above average and the Council was amongst the best 25 per cent of councils for its recovery of housing benefit overpayments. However, performance on collecting non domestic rates is below average.
- 74** The Council is able to demonstrate improvements in some areas of its activities by the large number of awards it has won. Awards are a good indication of improving services. Key recognition of the Council's achievements include being chosen as the finalist for Municipal Journal Best Achieving Council Awards 2006, Joint Winner of the LGC Council of the Year 2007, an Audit Commission award in 2006 for 'Partnership Work in Preventing Homelessness', two West Midlands Market Towns Awards, the awarding of a Green Flag in 2005 and 2006 to Abbey Park Evesham, finalist for MJ customer service in 2004, 12 Loo of the Year awards in 2006 and a national BURA Waterways Award for Evesham Riverside.

## Appendix 1 - Framework for Corporate Assessment

- 1 This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2 The Council's self assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
  - key documentation, including the Council's improvement plan;
  - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
  - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for Wychavon District Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 26 February to 2 March 2007.
- 4 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the Council.