



COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (CPA)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 All 238 district councils in England are being assessed between July 2003 and September 2004 by the Audit Commission.
- 1.2 The CPA gives people a single overall judgement on their council, rating each as excellent, good, fair, weak or poor.
- # 1.3 Attached to this paper is this Council's CPA report.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council's programme for CPA consisted of a Peer Challenge, Corporate Self Assessment including an auditor's judgement report from the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, diagnostic assessment of how the Council manages delivery of public space and housing and the on site inspection and report.
- 2.2 The Council took the view at an early stage that the CPA was an opportunity to learn and develop further.

3. DETAIL OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 Members will see from the report that the Council has received the top rating of excellent and improving.
- 3.2 There are too many highlights in the report to summarise them all here but the paragraph that perhaps best sums up the report is:
- 3.3 "New Forest District Council is an excellent and improving council which aspires to be the best. The Council is providing strong leadership to the community, providing excellent public services, a high quality environment and a housing service with user satisfaction among the best nationally."
- 3.4 The report is a credit to members and employees whose work over the years has placed the Council as an organisation of excellence.
- 3.5 The challenge now is to improve within excellence. The Council's Improvement Plan, which was part of the Corporate Self Assessment will be further developed in the light of the report and will be the subject of further discussions with members.

4. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising directly from this report.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no environmental implications arising directly from this report.

6. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

6.1 To follow

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that members:-

- (a) note the contents of the CPA Report; and
- (b) receive a report at a future meeting on the further development of the Council's Improvement Plan

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Background Papers:

None

Inspection report

January 2004

Comprehensive performance assessment

New Forest 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 website 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

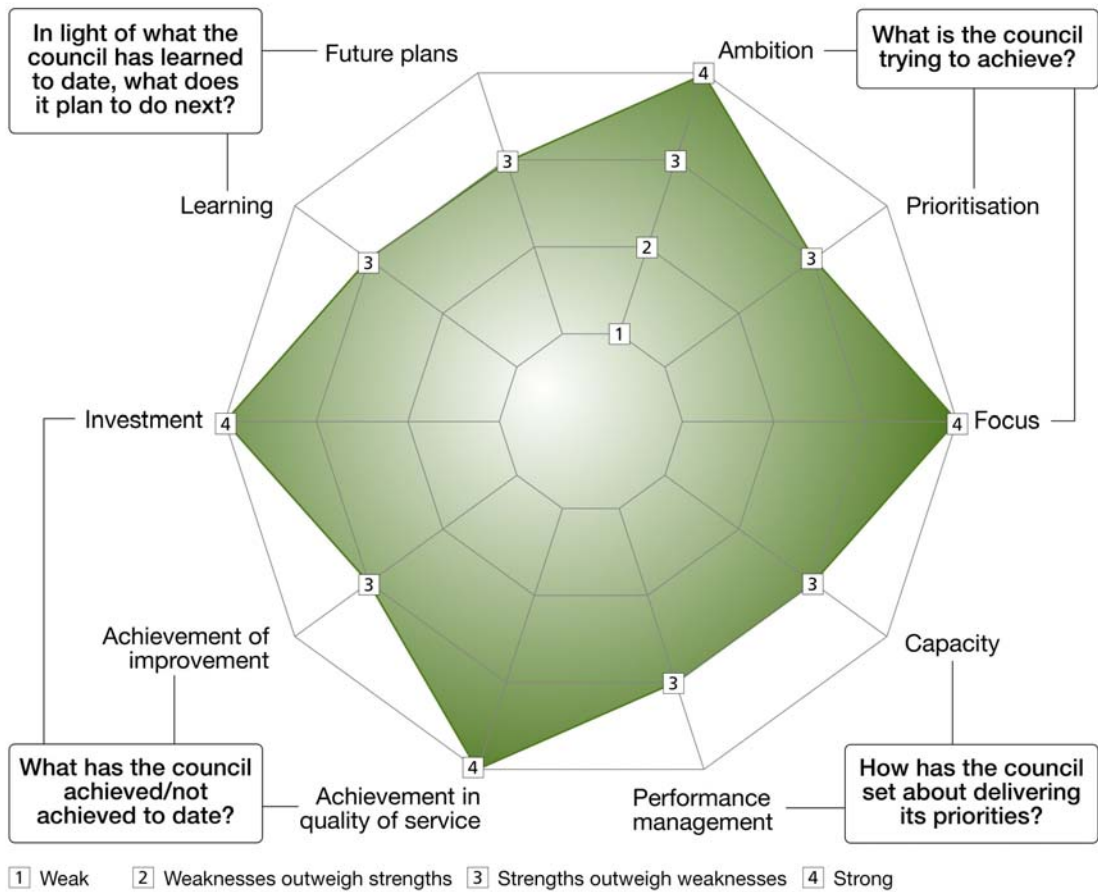
- 4 New Forest District Council is an excellent and improving council which aspires to be the best. The council is providing strong leadership to the community, providing excellent public services, a high quality environment and a housing service with user satisfaction among the best nationally.
- 5 The priorities set by the council are clear and based on extensive consultations with the community, partners and government. They achieve a good balance between national and local priorities but non-priority areas are not made explicit. The council has played a leading role in developing the community strategy through the local strategic partnership (LSP).
- 6 Councillors, managers and staff are proud to serve New Forest. They are professional, enthusiastic and work well together. They have a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities. Staff relations are excellent and staff are managed effectively through good human resources policies. The council has an empowering culture that is supportive and encourages innovation. It is focused on delivering results through effective partnership working.
- 7 The council has a new performance management system in place. The council's CPA improvement plan is good and covers the areas it needs to address to further improve performance. The plan covers activities which have a community focus – for example, finalising the community strategy, as well as internal issues – for example, developing flexible working arrangements.
- 8 The council is providing very high quality services and customer satisfaction is outstanding. Services are continuing to improve. The quality of the council's housing stock is good, but 31 per cent do not meet the decent homes standard. The quality of the local environment and the quality of life of local people are both very high.
- 9 The council is aware of its successes and what it needs to do to improve further. It is effective at sharing learning across the organisation, particularly at management level. It is an outward looking organisation that uses benchmarking and constructive relationships with others to develop its strategies and deliver results. However, its procurement strategy is under developed.
- 10 The council has a range of plans in place to drive improvement even further. Staff, partners, stakeholders and communities have been effectively engaged in developing these plans. The council has assessed what capacity it needs to implement its plans for the future. The exception to this robust approach is in the area of waste recycling, housing priorities and youth.

Summary of assessment scores

Top level question	Theme	Grade	Weighted score
What is the council trying to achieve?	Ambition	4	4
	Prioritisation	3	3
	Focus	4	4
How has the council set about delivering its priorities?	Capacity	3	3
	Performance management	3	3
What has the council achieved/not achieved to date?	Achievement in quality of service	4	12
	Achievement of improvement	3	9
	Investment	4	8
In light of what the council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	Learning	3	3
	Future plans	3	3
Weighted score			52
Corporate assessment category			Excellent

Diagram illustrating the themes and scores for New Forest District Council

New Forest District Council



Recommendations

- 11 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

- 12 New Forest is one of 11 district councils in the county of Hampshire. It covers an area of 753 square km lying between the large urban centres of Southampton and Bournemouth. The New Forest covers three-quarters of the district and, as well as having national importance for plants and wildlife, it provides for substantial recreational use, with over 7 million visits made to the forest each year. The district also has 65 km of coastline. Transport links are excellent, with easy access to railways, airports, the M27 and M3 motorways.
- 13 The district has a population of 169,331 living in 75,000 dwellings. In population terms it is the second largest district in England. Much of the district is rural and falls within the forest boundaries, where 30,000 residents live. Villages such as Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst lie in the New Forest itself. The remaining 83 per cent of the population live in the six towns around the edge of the district. About 18 per cent of the population are young people. The proportion of people from non-white ethnic groups is low at 1.1 per cent.
- 14 The key issues facing the locality include: maintaining the quality of the natural environment; high house prices and the shortage of affordable housing – in the past two years, the average house price has increased by 24 per cent to £210,000; increased pressure for development in the area around the New Forest; and an above-average retired and elderly population.
- 15 There are 5,500 businesses providing employment for over 60,000 people in the district, ranging in size from the major petro-chemical manufacturing plant at Fawley to small businesses. Tourism is a major component of the local economy and accounts for 7 per cent of jobs. Unemployment is low at 0.9 per cent, which is below both Hampshire and national averages. The area is prosperous – it is ranked 279th out of 354 councils in England, where 1 is the most deprived. There are pockets of deprivation in a few areas and the council is working with the community to address these. Crime rates are low.

The council

- 16 The council has 60 councillors and a Conservative administration. The political makeup of the council following elections in May 2003 is: 32 Conservatives, 27 Liberal Democrat and 1 Independent. In August 2001, it introduced a modernised political structure comprising a leader and cabinet, with six review panels responsible for overview and scrutiny. The cabinet and review panel chairs and vice chairs are members of the Conservative group.
- 17 The council is managed by a chief executive and three directors. The council employs 1,475 people, deployed between the four directorates – Chief Executive, Commercial, Community, and Resources. The general fund budget requirement for 2003/04 is £23.6 million, based on the cost of services, while the net general fund budget is £19.0 million. The capital programme is £8.4 million. The housing revenue account (HRA) balance is £2.3 million. The HRA expenditure budget is £22.6 million with an income of £23.2 million, resulting in a net surplus of £600,000 for the year. The council has debts of £7.6 million with capital reserves of £5.7 million and a housing stock of 5,294 properties. Thirty-one per cent of its homes do not currently meet the decent homes standard.
- 18 The peer challenge exercise for this inspection was undertaken by SOLACE Enterprises in July 2003.

What is the council trying to achieve?

Ambition

- 19 This is an area of strength for the council.
- 20 The council has a good understanding of the issues facing the locality and has made clear connections between those issues and its ambitions. It has done this by undertaking research – such as studying rural disadvantage and analysing the demographic profile of its community – and engaging effectively with its partners and the community through consultation. As a result the council can direct its work to those areas that affect the quality of life of local people.
- 21 The council has clear ambitions of what it wants to achieve for its community and locality which are expressed through its vision to enhance the quality of life for local people. This vision is clearly set out in the corporate plan – *The Heart of the Forest*:

‘To be an outward looking council, working closely with the community and in partnership with others to enhance the quality of lives of present and future generations by:

- Preserving the environment of the New Forest District for the peaceful enjoyment of residents and visitors;
- Helping to create and maintain a local economy that brings opportunities for jobs and economic benefits for the area; and
- Understanding and fulfilling local needs through creating and maintaining healthy and safe communities for the enjoyment of all.’

The council plans to deliver this vision by ensuring the best use of resources, by being innovative in its approach to deliver services and by developing effective partnerships with local organisations. The vision is underpinned by five corporate objectives over the next four years: organisation of excellence, working with public and partners, economic wellbeing, social wellbeing, and environmental wellbeing. These objectives are being delivered through 26 corporate aims, each of which has a specific strategy underpinning it. From these aims the council has identified 4 top priorities: clean streets and public spaces, crime and disorder and community safety, housing, and managing our finances. Linking each of the 26 aims directly to one of the 5 corporate objectives and to a specific strategy helps the council to create sustainable outcomes to meet its longer-term vision to improve the quality of people’s lives.

- 22 The council’s top priorities reflect the needs of the community and come from across the five strategic objectives. For example, the strategic objective – to be an organisation of excellence – has seven aims, one of which – manage our finances – is a top priority, because the council is concerned that excellence is not achieved at undue cost to the taxpayer and it wants to manage its finances efficiently. By having clear ambitions the council can gain support and ownership from its partners and the local community.

- 23 The financial strategy 2004/07 is good at linking in directly to the top priorities identified in the corporate plan. The council makes funds available to address its key priorities and aims to ensure that all expenditure proposals tie in with service plans which are based on the priorities of the council.
- 24 The council effectively engages partners and the community in developing its ambitions. For example, in July 2002, it organised the changing lives conference in order to understand the issues the district faces in order to develop a community strategy. The conference attracted over 130 local people and resulted in the identification of priority issues. These have fed into the local strategic partnership (LSP) and are shaping the draft community strategy. This shows that the council's approach to engagement is inclusive and focused.
- 25 The council gives effective leadership to the community. For example, it has been a skilful and committed advocate for the communities that may be affected if proposals to create a major container port and a National Park go ahead. Also, the council has led the development and operation of the LSP since 2001, and it is taking a lead role in developing the community strategy, which will be ready in draft form in December 2003. The LSP is chaired by a person external to the council and has developed community links through community action networks (CANS). A multi-agency operational group, the Community Action Team (CAT), links these to the LSP itself. The LSP sees the council as being enthusiastic and responsive to its needs. For example, a specific sub-group of the LSP is focusing on young people. The council makes a significant investment in supporting the LSP.
- 26 The council provides strong political and managerial leadership both internally and for the wider community. The leader and chief executive have a very good working relationship. Staff are proud to work for New Forest and are committed to serve local people by delivering high quality services. The council's partners spoke very highly on the professionalism and quality of staff and of the empowering leadership style of senior managers. Councillors, senior managers, staff and partners share a common purpose. Observation of the cabinet, review panels and senior management team meetings demonstrated that all people are enthusiastic about achieving the overall ambitions which have been set.
- 27 The council gives clear leadership to strategies to build cohesive and sustainable communities. For example, it introduced participatory needs assessments (PNAs) in deprived areas. Also, the council has long-term plans for the area in health and social inclusion – it has published a social inclusion draft issues report and is developing its approach to this issue through the LSP and the community strategy. The council has also been a key player in developing the strategy for the New Forest designed to improve life in the New Forest Heritage Area.
- 28 The council has good overall working relationships with the business community. There have been tensions between the LSP and the business community and it has worked hard over the last 12 months to build on the relationship. For example, the council worked closely with other stakeholders and supported the first LSP conference in May 2003. Also, it has worked with the business community to establish the New Forest Business Partnership, which is chaired by a representative from the private sector and whose board membership includes the council's portfolio holder for economy and planning.

Prioritisation

- 29 In this area strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 30 The council has set clear priorities for improvement which underpin its ambitions. It has developed its priorities with other stakeholders and with communities. For example, the council runs a citizens' panel eight times each year to consult residents on a wide range of subjects. Information on how those results have influenced council decisions are published in a newsletter sent to panel members quarterly. The council also uses the New Forest consultative panel – 70 plus organisations – as an effective tool to test views and give feedback. Engagement with tenants and young people is also effective. For example, it has created a young persons' panel to engage and give feedback and uses web questionnaires to consult on various issues.
- 31 The priorities are realistic and focused and in general match national and county priorities, such as recycling targets, to deliver improvement and reflect local need. This has resulted in, for example, 82 per cent of parish and town councils saying that they are clear about the council's priorities.
- 32 The council is making good progress on its aim for setting equalities and diversity work as a priority for improvement. It has appointed an equalities officer and integrated its race equality scheme into the equality standard action plan. By doing this the council is trying to take a broad strategic view of equality both in terms of employment and service delivery in order to meet the legal duty and also to improve services for local people. The council is already doing much to engage people with disability. It operates a disability helpline and has published a directory of council services for people with disabilities. It hosts regular meetings with the chairs of town and parish councils, clerks and the executive of the New Forest Association of Parish and Town Councils. Nevertheless, the council has been slow to respond to implementing the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) standard. It has not yet achieved level 1 of the standard but aims to do this by April 2004. The council is now investing additional resources in supporting this work.
- 33 The council's priorities are effectively communicated internally and externally. Freelance journalists are used to write articles in the local residents' newspaper – *Forest News* – which is produced three times a year, jointly with the police, local primary care trust (PCT) and Forestry Commission. The council sends out regular press releases via email to town and parish clerks which are then distributed to councillors. Council officers regularly visit town and parish councils and provide training and briefings on specific issues. The council hosts meetings of the chairs of town and parish councils quarterly and council officers and parish and town clerks meet regularly.
- 34 The council's internet site is used to effectively communicate priorities. The council supports town and parish websites and there are links to other agencies providing services to the public. There is an internal staff newspaper – *Paperwork* – and a staff cyber magazine. The council uses cascade briefings and open days to keep people updated. It uses its intranet – Forestnet – to effectively communicate with staff and councillors. It is easy to navigate and user-friendly.

- 35 The council has an integrated approach to allocating resources against priorities. Its three-year financial strategy is reviewed and revised annually prior to the budget process. The strategy is able to reflect changing government initiatives and can link resources with corporate priorities.
- 36 Meeting the Government's decent homes standard (DHS) has only become a priority relative recently and as a result detailed plans are not yet in place. The council's approach to identifying what are not priorities is service rather than strategically based and consequently the council has not made explicit what are not its priorities.

Focus

- 37 This is an area of strength for the council.
- 38 The council maintains a good focus on achieving impact in priority areas – for example, on housing, which is one of the council's top four priorities. The importance the council attaches to this is demonstrated by the fact that it has a portfolio holder for this area and a review panel to scrutinise work.
- 39 The council has appropriate mechanisms and tools in place to enable it to maintain a strong focus on what matters. For example, the cabinet is focused on corporate issues, with portfolios matched to priority areas within the corporate plan, and its meetings are efficient and business-like. Cabinet reports are succinct, well structured and well written. All reports to the cabinet and review panels explicitly state the financial, community safety and environmental implications in the proposals – reflecting the council's main priorities at the present time.
- 40 The council makes good use of information to keep on track. Review panels, which scrutinise decisions taken by cabinet and inform cabinet decisions, are effective. The meeting of the environment review panel in September 2003 focused on air quality and the development of the environment service plan. Review panels have an annual work programme and their meetings are well chaired. Quarterly budget reports help review panels to stay focused on the council's actual financial position. Portfolio holders on the cabinet attend meetings of the review panel as observers at the request of the panel and this ensures that they are well informed and can maintain an effective link to the cabinet.
- 41 The council has clear protocols for councillors and officers covering roles and responsibilities. These are widely publicised and are on the intranet. Specific services, for example, planning also have protocols for councillors.
- 42 Corporate and directorate management teams meet weekly, and every month there is a heads of service meeting with corporate management team (CMT) where the focus is on managing performance against priorities for the whole organisation. Agendas of management teams show that officers keep focused on the council's priorities. Meetings observed were well managed.

- 43 Senior officers and councillors maintain their focus and are not distracted from dealing with difficult issues. For example, the council is opposing the proposal for a major container port at Dibden Bay. It has targeted resources and effort over a long time at building its case so as to ensure that the interests of the community are fully represented.
- 44 Specific initiatives are undertaken with a clear purpose and the council sustains its focus on these to ensure the desired impact is achieved. For example, the council has had a dedicated steering group overseeing the direction of e-government for over two years. This is championed by the chief executive, who is also the e-government champion. There is good analysis and reporting of progress to date on e-government and the council has identified the risks ahead. There is a good electronic service delivery action plan. The council can maintain focus over time and this is reflected in the fact that the council is ahead of the government timetable, already achieving 70 per cent of e-government implementation against a target of 25 per cent by 2003.
- 45 The council use best value reviews (BVR) to drive forward improvement. For example, cabinet considered a report on information and communication technology recently and approved a five-year action plan to improve the service.
- 46 Audit Commission inspection reports are not all scrutinised by review panels. The council is changing its procedures ensuring that, in future, councillors have the opportunity to consider reports and follow up any recommendations made for improvement.

How has the council set about delivering its priorities?

Capacity

- 47 Strengths outweigh weakness in this area.
- 48 Councillors and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and there is an appropriate level of delegation between them. They enjoy good relations and there is effective decision making at cabinet and senior management level. Staff and councillors are proud to serve New Forest and are enthusiastic about the future. Staff morale is very high and relations with trade unions are very good.
- 49 The council is proud of its partnerships, and there are numerous examples of effective and strong partnership working across business, voluntary and statutory organisations. Examples include working with the local PCT to integrate health and social issues in communities through the PNA work, working with Test Valley Borough Council on waste and other public space-related services, and working with the county council and town and parish councils on civil engineering and highways work.
- 50 The council is building organisational capacity by working across services. For example, in New Milton the council has brought together several agencies – such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB), New Milton Town Council, the county council, the Benefits Agency, Jobs Centre Plus and the probation and pensions service – into a single building and provided affordable homes on the same site too.
- 51 The council has invested heavily over recent years in information and communication technology (ICT) and has matched government grants for developing e-government in order to meet national targets. It has hosted a major conference for the business community on introducing broad band technology and e-government into the locality. It has also invested in supporting equalities and diversity by employing additional staff dedicated to adding capacity in this area.
- 52 The council is willing to try new ways of working to maximise capacity. It has jointly funded posts with health and district council partners. It has a major partnership arrangement with the Test Valley Borough Council, and with private sector partners, to share expertise and resources and improve services. It has partnerships with other voluntary sector organisations – particularly around its priority areas.
- 53 The council has the financial capacity it needs to deliver its priorities. It achieves a balanced budget, meets its financial targets and has healthy reserves. Its asset management plan has received a good rating from the Government Office for the South East (GOSE). The external auditor has judged the council's governance and internal audit arrangements to be good in terms of financial standing, standards of financial control and legality of significant transactions and adequate in terms of financial statements and systems of internal control.
- 54 The council has effective arrangements for cabinet and review panels. Observations of meetings showed them to be well chaired, structured and open. Councillors provide strong challenge in review panels and the quality of officer reports presented was high.

- 55 The council has a strategic approach to human resources and good policies which are used to manage staff resources. It has a caring and supportive approach towards staff which is underpinned by a culture of empowerment, rather than blame. Turnover and sickness absence are equal to the benchmark for other Hampshire councils.
- 56 The council is making good efforts to tackle staff shortages in some areas. For example, it has worked with the Hampshire student consortium of environmental health officers and other districts to enable students to transfer between councils in Hampshire without having to pay back training costs. It has also introduced succession planning to retain staff.
- 57 Development programmes for councillors are good and regularly take account of changes in new legislation and council priorities. All new councillors undertake a comprehensive induction programme. Councillors have a year-long programme of development contained within their review panel meetings. This mostly takes the form of briefings but also site demonstrations and discussion forums. This helps keep councillors up-to-date on the latest developments. The scrutiny role is continuing to develop and works effectively overall. The council has invested in scrutiny through the development of councillors.
- 58 Staff development is good and is directly linked to council plans through a competency based performance development process. All staff are appraised annually. However, all training is not evaluated to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the council and therefore the council could be missing opportunities to maximise the full potential of staff.
- 59 The council has a procurement strategy in place but this is in need of further development. The strategy has a strong section on sustainable purchasing but has little on partnership working or modern contractual principles. For example, there is no guidance as to how quality should be taken into account when assessing tenders. In addition the presumption of in-house service provision is too strong and does not encourage competition. Without clear guidance through a strong and purposeful procurement strategy the council may not achieve the best mix of quality, cost and service delivery. As an example, the planned maintenance for the council's housing stock is arranged through a number of individual contracts. The benefits of a long-term partnering arrangement have not been realised.

Performance management

- 60 In this area strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 61 The council has a new performance management system in place which is good, strategically focused and provides a framework within which services operate. The framework, introduced in April 2003, is driven by the council's ambitions and priorities and has strong links to corporate objectives. It is clearly understood by staff and councillors. The framework provides for both CMT and cabinet to make full use of performance information and stakeholder feedback to shape decision making. Prior to its introduction the council's performance management has been operating at a service level for many years.

- 62 The council's service plans are good. It has taken its priorities and translated these through into its service plans. This has resulted in the development of service plans which have specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART) targets.
- 63 The best value performance plan (BVPP) is good. The BVPP clearly identifies both best value performance indicators (BVPIs) and local performance indicators (PIs). This enables appropriate corrective action to be taken in response to variations. It has been highly commended by the Audit Commission and users for its clarity and content. For example, it sets out portfolio holders' accountability for services and corporate priorities and shows clearly, with a colour-coded traffic light system, where performance indicators are either improving or failing and where they are in comparison to others, nationally or in Hampshire.
- 64 The council uses best value reviews to achieve value for money. For example, it is proposing to introduce a charging mechanism for car parking to better utilise car parks and improve traffic management. Councillors have had a long history of active involvement in best value. The grounds maintenance service was brought back in-house following problems with the external contractor. This resulted in greater control over the level and quality of service. The council uses project management principles to drive programmes of work.
- 65 Performance monitoring arrangements are good. Progress is monitored by the heads of service and directorate management teams working with the relevant portfolio holder. Review panels are then used to give independent scrutiny to the process. All review panels receive quarterly reports on performance and have the opportunity to challenge performance and make recommendation for improvement. In 2003 the housing, health and social inclusion review panel scrutinised reports on the following: housing best value review, budgetary control report, performance indicators, citizens' panel results and future programme, Audit Commission report on housing reactive maintenance, service plans, and financial reporting. This process has resulted in better services – for example, the report on the housing maintenance service led to a detailed action plan and improvements in communication with tenants and contractors and a more effective appointments system.
- 66 The council provides a clear yearly performance report for tenants. It sets out 86 performance targets across the housing service together with both current performance and performance over the last four years. The document enables tenants to assess the quality of service provided and whether or not it is improving. However, reporting of progress against the decent homes standard (DHS) is weak and is not included in the annual performance report.
- 67 The council has robust financial management and monitoring arrangements and overall an integrated approach to performance and financial planning. Both cabinet and CMT have a history of monitoring the council's financial performance and regularly receive reports. They also receive reports on performance relating to the council's priorities, for example, the outcomes from the benchmarking of recreation centres and the service delivery options relating to the central control and lifelines service. However, there is no formal monitoring of customer services targets and the council needs to do more to monitor performance against service level agreements.

- 68 The council has a good individual performance monitoring system in place which is linked to a competency based assessment process. All staff receive appraisals and this is consistently applied across the organisation. Individuals confirmed that they were clear on how their work contributes to the council's strategic objectives.
- 69 Senior managers have a clear understanding of risk and manage it appropriately. The council is risk aware particularly when entering new arenas. The Dibden Bay container port issue is an example of where the council undertook a risk assessment before making a huge investment in opposing this development, in accordance with its strategic policies. The council also requires that business cases for all capital and revenue bids must contain risk assessments.
- 70 The performance management framework is in its first year of implementation and has not yet proved itself in terms of directly contributing to improvements in services. This means that to be fully effective the framework will need to be used to review current performance and achievements and establish the future direction of services.

What has the council achieved / not achieved to date?

Achievement in quality of service

- 71 This is an area of strength.
- 72 The community has demonstrated high levels of satisfaction with the council's services. Overall satisfaction of 92 per cent is the highest in the country. The council is also rated highly by stakeholders and partners; for example, 75 per cent of parish councils scored the council 7 and above (out of 10). In specific areas satisfaction levels for cleanliness, waste collection, leisure and cultural facilities are in the best 25 per cent nationally (2001/02 figures). Tenants' satisfaction with the condition of the council housing stock is also high. These strong levels of satisfaction show that the council is delivering services of the quality and efficiency that local people expect.
- 73 The council's performance compares favourably with other councils. The latest performance indicators for 2001/02 show that 45 per cent of its indicators compare with the best 25 per cent of councils, and 81 per cent of its performance indicators are above average. None of the council's performance indicators are in the worst 25 per cent nationally.
- 74 The quality of the council's services is generally confirmed as high by external assessment. Audit Commission inspections of recreation, tourism and planning services concluded that they were all good services. The council has achieved beacon status for housing and council tax benefits, and for the Project Integra waste management partnership, the latter along with other district councils in Hampshire. It is also investor in people accredited and was assessed as providing a fair to good performance by the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate (BFI). An inspection of some of the environmental services achieved a 'fair' score.
- 75 The council provides good public access to its services. Its public offices are well distributed across the district and provide physical access for people with disabilities.

The achievements in quality of service are related to the key service priorities as follows:

Clean streets and public spaces

- 76 The council is effective in managing the physical environment and keeping public spaces clean. These are two key priorities for the council. It is aware of the local environmental issues and makes good efforts to address them. The streets and public open spaces meet a uniformly high standard of cleanliness. The waste recycling rate is among the best 25 per cent of councils nationally, and the quantity of household waste collected is low.

Crime and disorder and community safety

- 77 Community safety is one of the council's four key priorities, and it is achieving some good results in this area. Initiatives the council has worked on with partners are making an impact on community safety. These include, CCTV, diversionary activities for young people, domestic violence, antisocial behaviour and work aimed at reducing the fear of crime. Community safety is an integral part of the delivery of the council's services.

Housing

- 78 The quality of the council's services in relation to housing is mixed. The housing stock is in good structural condition but 31 per cent of houses fail the decent homes standard. There is good tenant satisfaction with the housing repairs service but the appointments system is still being developed. In the key area of affordable housing the council has increased the requirement for larger developments to 35 per cent – this has contributed to the council meeting its own target of 100 new affordable homes per year. The council has a wideranging empty homes strategy but the number of empty homes brought into occupation has fallen significantly below target – 16 homes against a target of 50.

Achievement of improvement

- 79 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area.
- 80 The council's performance against national performance indicators is improving. Between 2000/01 and 2001/02, 53 per cent of the council's performance indicators show an improvement. This is particularly impressive given that most of the council's performance indicators are above average and many are among the best 25 per cent of councils. Latest performance indicator data suggests this improvement trend is being maintained. There is clear evidence that services are improving. In the last three years, nearly half of performance indicators have improved by more than 3 per cent.
- 81 The council is achieving significant improvements to a range of services. Initiatives such as the multi-agency locality based walkabouts and the participatory needs assessments are resulting in real improvements in the quality of life for local people. Untidy neighbourhoods have been cleaned up and new facilities provided such as activities for young people.
- 82 Customer access to services has also improved. The customer services team is expanding to provide a first point of public contact for an increasing number of the council's services. The council's website is progressively providing more public information, communication channels and direct access to services. For example, planning applications can be viewed and progress monitored online. The council has also introduced information kiosks in its local offices, which allows people to access council services and pay bills. Access to the council's public buildings and facilities is also improving in good time to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act deadline for physical access to services.

The achievements in improvement are related to the key service priorities as follows:

Clean streets and public spaces

- 83 The council is achieving improvements against this priority. The standard of cleanliness of the streets and public spaces is already high and is improving. The time taken to remove fly-tips and abandoned vehicles is reducing and targeted action has been introduced to tackle hot spots. The kerb side collection of recyclable materials has been expanded to 96 per cent of residents and additional recycling centres have been provided at locations which are convenient to customers. However, very little progress has been made in some services, such as composting and waste minimisation.

Crime and disorder and community safety

- 84 The council is making positive progress to achieve its aim of providing a safe community by working in partnership. CCTV systems have been introduced in some of the main town centres and are being used as a deterrent and to solve crime. The council has teamed up partner organisations to provide a home security check and equipment for people who feel vulnerable in their homes. Specific initiatives, such as providing diversionary activities aimed at reducing incidents of minor disorder and vandalism by young people are a success. Victims of violence and intimidation receive more support and advice following the appointment of a domestic violence and acceptable behaviour co-ordinator. Acceptable behaviour orders and antisocial behaviour orders are increasingly used against perpetrators.

Housing

- 85 Tenants are experiencing the benefits of improved quality in the housing stock. The council's planned maintenance investment programme has resulted in nearly all its homes having double glazing and central heating. Improvements have also been felt by the less mobile – for instance following the door replacement contracts the majority of properties are accessible by wheel chair. In addition lever operated taps are being installed as standard to facilitate use by tenants who have difficulty in gripping. Progress has also been made against the DHS with number of failing properties being reduced by 19 per cent since 2002. These improvements following consultation with tenants' representatives and reflect the priorities of users. The council has a wideranging empty homes strategy but the number of empty homes brought into occupation has fallen significantly below target – 16 homes against a target of 50.
- 86 External assessment of the council's potential to improve services further is variable. Two Audit Commission inspections concluded that there are promising prospects for improvement for the services inspected and a Benefits Fraud inspection assessed the council's proven capacity to improve as good. However, a recent report by the Audit Commission on the housing maintenance service concludes that very limited service improvement has been made over the last ten years, and an inspection of some parts of the environment health service concludes that there are uncertain prospects for improvement.

Investment

- 87 This is an area of strength for the council.
- 88 The council has put in place building blocks which address existing gaps and will drive future improvement. It has introduced a new performance management framework and is using the annual service planning process to identify resource needs against priority areas for improvement. The LSP and community planning process is leading to real improvements in partnership working in services such as health and social inclusion. The council is undertaking a review of communications across the organisation in order to develop further its internal and external communications plans and make improved links by harnessing improvements in e-government. The council has an extensive training and development programme to support staff, supervisors and managers deliver improving services. At an individual service level the council's good quality housing strategy is an essential building block to enable the council to address its housing priorities.

- 89 The council is investing in further improvements in service planning and through its CPA improvement plan identifies specific action to be taken. It is already making progress and issuing detailed guidance to improve further the councillor engagement in the service planning process.
- 90 The council is effectively targeting its resources to improve performance in priority areas. For example, the planning delivery grant it received this year has all been invested in extra resources to improve the speed of processing planning applications.
- 91 The council is investing heavily in service improvement, effective partnership working and meaningful community engagement. For example, it is working with the county council and other districts in Hampshire to tackle air pollution. It is working with English Nature on sites of special scientific interest to preserve the natural environment. The council is investing in more recycling points in rural areas and intensive publicity campaigns to boost participation in recycling schemes. It is improving the speed of processing planning applications. The council is working with parish councils to produce village statements setting out design parameters for the locality.
- 92 The council has secured the necessary resources to drive future improvements in priority areas at a local and regional level. For example, in respect of the community legal services partnership, the council successfully bid for £200,000 from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to improve access to services in partnership with other organisations. Also, it has successfully secured £192,000 from DEFRA to improve and expand its kerbside collection of recyclable materials this year.
- 93 The council has a robust medium-term financial plan in place to guide its investment decisions. It has the necessary resources to drive future improvements in priority areas and it is already allocating resources accordingly. For example, government funding has been used to introduce a CCTV system in the district.
- 94 The council compares itself with the best councils, and it is receptive to different ways of doing things. For example, personnel and payroll services participate in national benchmarking. Also, refuse collection and street cleansing have reviewed their competitiveness through a benchmarking group. Building maintenance has a history of comparing itself with the best councils and now it undertakes work in partnership with the private sector in several areas of work.
- 95 BVRs and other challenge mechanisms for continuous improvement have been effective in delivering improvements. For example, the people strategy and personnel business plan were produced following feedback from the best value review of personnel. One of the key outcomes of the information services review was the amalgamation of the cashiering and information services. In commercial services, the best value review process was the catalyst for creating a single team in refuse and street cleansing in partnership with Test Valley Borough Council. The best value review of recreation centres and their former catering areas resulted in a number of conversions to health and fitness facilities and soft play area, which has generated an additional income of £100,000 a year. The challenge of the IDeA peer review three years ago resulted in a rationalised senior management team better focused on strategic issues and heads of service focused on delivering services.

- 96 The council can do more. For example, in planning for future skills needs, there is an opportunity to maximise capacity in the organisation by better using the new competency framework to identify and nurture talented staff and create opportunities for greater development.
- 97 The council has recently developed a comprehensive risk management strategy. The new procedure is not yet embedded into the organisation but the strategy outlines the reasons for the need for effective risk management, who will be responsible and how it is to be achieved.

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

Learning

- 98 In this area strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 99 The council's self-assessment is open and honest and shows that it understands what it has achieved and what it still has to do. The council's leadership also welcomes the challenge that the CPA process will provide and see it as an opportunity to improve performance.
- 100 The council is very open and has developed a very positive no blame culture throughout the organisation. The culture of empowerment encourages creativity, innovation and managed risk taking.
- 101 The council learns through the results of consulting stakeholders and local people. For example, the change to the opening hours of gyms and to the range and content of gym membership came directly from consulting customers. Also, as a result of consulting on the joint health strategy, the local PCT and the council jointly invested in the GP referral exercise prescription and quitters schemes.
- 102 The council is continuously looking for new opportunities to learn from other service providers. The council is a founder member of the 'southern ten' benchmarking group. The council instigated the benchmarking club five years ago, and it has grown to become a national benchmarking club. The response times on noise complaints was reduced from seven days to three days as a result of benchmarking. It has also taken part in a peer review with five other housing authorities.
- 103 The council encourages external challenge. For example, it requested an external assessment of its housing maintenance service and as a result put in place a number of significant changes. It has learnt from previous best value inspected reviews and is incorporating cross-cutting themes in its future best value review programme.
- 104 Learning takes place effectively through seeking accreditation; for example, Investors in People, Lexel for legal services, and Beacon status for housing and council tax benefits administration. The council has also been involved in piloting and experimentation including choice-based letting.
- 105 The council learns from its own experiences and makes changes in light of this. For example, a housing maintenance officer noticed the potential of a large garden for development when a property became vacant and passed the information to the housing development team. A formalised process has now been developed to ensure that this information is captured on all occasions. Also, the housing service has in place arrangements to help it learn from others. For example, officers visited a housing association to learn from its partnering arrangements and a senior manager had a six-month secondment with an RSL.

- 106 Learning is shared effectively across the senior management of the council. Heads of service meet once per month to share views across the organisation and contribute to the corporate management of the organisation. For example, during 2003 there has been cross-departmental learning on setting service plans. The council takes opportunities to learn from its staff by undertaking exit surveys and stress surveys.
- 107 The council uses customers' feedback to improve services. For example, it surveys customers using its recycling centres to gain information on customer satisfaction. Also, the council has good knowledge of the use of its leisure centres by young people – a computerised payment system maintains records of use of the facilities by young people.
- 108 The council's complaints policy is inconsistently applied across the organisation. Each service is responsible for responding to its own complaints. In some areas, for example, environmental health, the complaints system is more formal than in other areas. Only more complicated issues and complaints unresolved at service level are passed to the chief executive. This means that the council is missing the opportunity to learn from a whole council approach to analysing complaints. There have been no cases of maladministration found against the council in recent years.
- 109 Staff at middle manager level and below have limited opportunities to share ideas and experiences with each other. This means that there is not cohesive organisation wide learning and the council may be missing an opportunity to maximise the potential of its entire staff.

Future plans

- 110 In future plans strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 111 The council has a range of robust plans and strategies derived from the corporate plan which relate to the ambitions for the locality and its priority areas. The plans include clear milestones and set a framework for the short and long term. For example, the council has a range of integrated strategies to address the issues of housing need. These include the housing strategy action plan, the local plan, and a private sector strategy. The housing strategy is good and is supported by effective development control policies together with an empty homes strategy. All will make a contribution in addressing the issue of affordable homes and the increasing numbers of people on the housing register. The council has a strong financial strategy over the medium term.
- 112 The council also has other plans in place to improve services. For example, it has a strategy to improve its response to customer enquiries. A contact centre is already operational for environmental issues and the plan is to expand this on an incremental basis to include other services. The council is working with tenants to reprioritise its forward maintenance programme so as to meet its target of delivering the DHS by 2010. It is also planning for the implications of the National Park.
- 113 Staff, partners, stakeholders and communities have been effectively engaged in developing these plans. For example, the council is progressing well in the development of the community plan through the LSP. When complete the community plan will represent a multi-agency approach to addressing the key issues facing the district.

- 114 The council continues to seek ways of improving its engagement of partners, stakeholders and communities in the development and delivery of ambitions and priorities. For example, the council effectively involved staff and partners in the development of its housing strategy. It used a multidisciplinary officer team with a network of multi-agency stakeholder groups and a variety of consultation methods. This engagement has resulted in the strategy reflecting local needs and having community ownership.
- 115 The council has assessed what capacity it needs to implement its plans for the future and has taken steps to address any gaps. For example, the council is progressing positively with plans to evaluate options for the management of its housing stock. It has also moved resources into the priority area of equalities and diversity.
- 116 The exceptions to this robust approach to future planning are in the area of waste recycling, housing priorities and youth. The council does not have a clear course of action to meet its statutory waste recycling targets. The council recognises that it needs its own strategy and work on this is due to be completed by the end of December 2003. The council's plan for delivering its housing priorities are not fully developed in all areas. The housing business plan does not meet the 'fit for purpose' criteria, and the council does not yet have smart plans to deliver the DHS. The council has a narrowly focused youth strategy.

Summary of theme scores and strengths / weaknesses

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambitions reflect local, regional and national agenda • Leadership and management • Key role in developing LSP and community strategy • Councillors, staff, managers and partners share a common purpose • Clear ambitions • Inclusive community engagement 	
Prioritisation	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear priorities • Involving community in setting priorities • Communication of priorities to the community • Resources matched to priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-priority areas are not explicit • Not achieved level 1 of Race Equality Standard
Focus	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant and timely information • Ability to maintain focus on initiatives • CMT, cabinet, review panels • Matching portfolio to key priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process for following through best value inspection documents
Capacity	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership working • Staff relations • Calibre of councillors, management and staff • Clear roles and responsibilities of councillors and staff • Use human resources policies to manage staff resources • Staff morale and motivation • Relations with other councils and PCT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not realising full potential of staff • Procurement practices underdeveloped
Performance management	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular reporting to councillors on service performance • SMART service plan actions • Financial monitoring • Performance management framework • Open about own performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New PMS has not yet proved itself
Achievement in quality of service	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High proportion of BVPIs are above average and best 25 per cent • Satisfaction levels (residents, users, tenants and partners) • Comparison with others • Innovative services • Community safety • Structural condition of council homes • Activities for young people • Customer access • Waste recycling • Clean public spaces • Good external assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some BVPIs not meeting targets • 31% homes do not meet the DHS

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement of improvement	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining and improving performance on most BVPIs • Improving number of services • Customer access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of progress on some areas that contribute to key priorities
Investment	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT infrastructure • Sound financial management • Policies to support service delivery • Development of LSP • Securing external funding • Significant improvements to services following reviews • Management development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management • Planning for future skills needs
Learning	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning from other service providers • Encourage external challenge • External accreditation • Learning from own experiences • Gets customer views • Learning from staff • Open and honest self-assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate complaints policy is inconsistently applied • Learning across the organisation at lower levels
Future plans	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial planning • Strategies to deliver four key priorities • Planning for implications of national park • Engaging partners in the development of future plans • Plans to improve services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No strategy to meet waste targets • Plans re DHS incomplete and narrowly focused youth strategy

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?

- 117 The council has both the ambition and the resources to meet the DHS. There is a strong culture of tenant involvement and positive progress has been made towards stock option evaluation. However, the council does not have an accurate assessment of the number of houses that fail the DHS and the housing revenue account (HRA) business plan is not 'fit for purpose'. Overall there are more strengths than weaknesses in this category.
- 118 The council has a good information base about the condition of its housing stock. This was established by a full survey carried out during 1998. Planned maintenance records supplement the data base and the council has a record of the asbestos risks associated with each property. The council had intended to update the survey at 20 per cent per year but is falling behind and is achieving little more than half its target.
- 119 The council does not currently have an accurate figure for the number of houses that do not meet DHS although it has taken a rigorous approach to determining it. In order to establish the exact numbers the council has agreed with tenants an acceptable layout for kitchens and is currently re-surveying its houses against that standard. This is a particularly robust approach and while the council does not know the precise number of its houses that fail the DHS it is able to estimate the maximum number and therefore the maximum cost of delivering the standard.
- 120 The council estimates that currently a maximum of 31 per cent of its properties (1,877 houses) fail to meet the DHS. However, early results from the kitchen layout survey suggest this figure is likely to be significantly reduced. The council has estimated that the cost of meeting the DHS, based on 1,877 houses, is £10.9 million and has demonstrated that this can be met from its ten-year planned maintenance programme following re-prioritisation.
- 121 The council is clear in its ambition to meet the DHS by 2010. Housing is a corporate priority and both the housing strategy and the HRA business plan state that meeting the DHS by 2010 is a key objective. Councillors and officers have a clear understanding of the requirements of the DHS and have shown a determination to meet the target of 2010. This clear and integrated approach will ensure that the council focuses on delivering the DHS objective.
- 122 While the council's stock is in good structural condition, with all properties having central heating and double glazing, it does not have detailed plans to meet the DHS. The council's HRA business plan failed to meet five out of the ten fit-for-purpose criteria, mainly because of weaknesses in the area of meeting the DHS. The council estimates that the DHS will be met between 2006 and 2010, the precise timing being determined by the amount of work that needs to be carried out and the priorities of tenants.

- 123 There is now a strong culture of tenant involvement. Following a difficult initial period elections were introduced to strengthen the democratic base of the tenants' consultative group. Tenants' representatives get the same briefing papers as councillors and have a (non-voting) seat at cabinet. A tenants' compact is in place and the council publishes a good quality newspaper for tenants, Round the Houses, on a quarterly basis. Tenants hold the majority of places on the editorial team for the newspaper. Satisfaction with the opportunities for consultation is high, with the council being in the best 25 per cent nationally. These effective arrangements for tenant involvement will enable the council to respond to the requirements of users in assessing maintenance need.
- 124 Engagement with tenants regarding the planned maintenance programme is effective and has resulted in budget reallocations. For example the 2003/04 programme was amended to reflect the priorities that tenants give to environmental improvements. However, the opportunities exist for earlier consultation – the yearly planned maintenance programme is considered and agreed by the tenants' consultative group but the group is not involved in developing the programme and this restricts their opportunity to influence priorities.
- 125 The council does not have clear objectives with relation to security and physical impairment issues, but it has put in place a number of positive initiatives. For example, the door replacement contract uses extra-wide doors as standard to facilitate wheelchair access. The council has also responded to requests for additional lighting to reduce the likelihood, and fear, of crime.
- 126 The council is progressing positively with plans to evaluate options for the management of its housing stock. Although the council predicts it can meet DHS from existing resources it recognises that alternative arrangements for stock management could enable it to provide higher standards and make progress against its affordable housing targets. To ensure that tenants are fully involved in the process the council has advertised for the post of independent tenant adviser; the successful applicant will be chosen in conjunction with the tenants' panel. One of the adviser's first jobs will be to devise a communications strategy to ensure that all tenants are kept aware of developing options and have all the information they need. The council's programme is for the evaluation of the stock options to be completed by June 2004.
- 127 The council's procurement strategy does not embrace modern contractual principles. It does not give any advice on how the quality element of the contract should be assessed or how quality and cost should be balanced. There is no reference to the Egan report *Re-thinking Construction*; nor are there any stated principles around partnership working. As a result the council will not realise the quality, cost and reliability benefits of longer-term collaborative working.

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

- 128 The council has made good progress in meeting the DHS, has entered into a modern partnership contract for reactive maintenance and has very high levels of tenant satisfaction. However, there is a more traditional contractual approach to planned maintenance. This is an area of strength for the council.

- 129 The council has made good progress in reducing the number of properties that fail the DHS. Since 2002, the number of these properties has fallen from 2,329 to 1,877 – a reduction of 19 per cent.
- 130 The council has identified the resources it needs to fund the works necessary to meet the DHS. The forward planned maintenance programme is in the order of £3.5 million per year, and this will be primarily funded through the MRA (£3.0 million), with additional finance from the housing revenue account (HRA). The estimated cost of £10.9 million required for improvements to the layout of kitchens (which are necessary for the housing stock to meet the DHS) can be met from the planned maintenance budget.
- 131 In line with its corporate priorities, the council has allocated its capital receipts to help fund affordable housing. The council is able to spend approximately £1.25 million per year from the sale of council houses and this is used in partnership with registered social landlords (RSLs) to fund social housing. For the past few years the council has funded £0.5 million of environmental improvements to estates through the HRA but this has now stopped because of reduced HRA balances and the need to concentrate on affordable homes. The council is therefore allocating resources according to its priorities.
- 132 The council has not reviewed its budget allocations or its costs. Business units (for example accountancy) allocate their time to the HRA on an annual basis but there is little challenge built into the process. There has not been a rigorous review of budget allocations to ensure that they reflect priorities. Management costs are above average for councils in the region. The council may be missing opportunities to reduce some of its costs.
- 133 Effective rent collection means that the council is maximising its income from that source. Performance indicators show that the council is in the best 25 per cent for the percentage of rent collected, arrears, rents lost from vacant dwellings and average re-let time.
- 134 The council is developing effective links between the planned and reactive maintenance teams. There is a formal process, through use of a pro-forma, where an inspector will inform the planned maintenance team if work would be better carried out through the planned maintenance programme. Quarterly meetings between the teams are held to ensure co-ordination and consistency. The housing inspections have an input to the yearly planned maintenance programme at its inception stage and when the draft programme has been completed. As a result of these and other measures the council has, over the last four years, averaged a 64:36 per cent split between planned and reactive maintenance, which is in line with good practice guidelines.
- 135 While the council generally has strong partnership arrangements with RSLs, there is no evidence of joint working in the area of housing maintenance. There are five RSL liaison groups in operation and a New Forest partnership agreement which establishes a set of core standards and objectives for the council and its partner RSLs to achieve. However, the council and RSLs do not work together on maintenance contracts and as a result the potential for cost savings is not being examined.

- 136 The council's approach to procurement is not strong in the area of planned maintenance. This work is let through a series of traditional contracts which, although adequate, are limited in their partnership approach. For example, they contain little to encourage innovation and contractors do not specifically share in the objective to meet the DHS. However, the council has shown in its approach to reactive maintenance that it is willing to adopt modern contractual practices. It recently let a four-year partnership contract which was evaluated on the basis of 60 per cent quality and 40 per cent cost. Tenants were fully involved in the selection of the winning contractor. The reactive maintenance contract will bring long-term benefits in terms of quality, reliability and cost – the council will need to take the same approach for planned maintenance to realise the same benefits.
- 137 The council does not require its in-house contractor New Forest Commercial Services (NFCS) to tender for work in competition. NFCS agree with housing officers at the beginning of each financial year what planned maintenance work they are able to undertake and demonstrate their competitiveness by comparison with rates submitted by external contractors. While the council is able to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of NFCS, the lack of a competitive process means that the council may not be achieving optimum value for money.
- 138 The council has worked well with Hampshire Supporting People Forum to ensure effective implementation of the supporting people arrangements. For example, the council's warden service is partly funded by the supporting people's grant administered by HCC. The council does not predict that supporting people will result in any negative budgetary implications or impact on its ability to meet the DHS.
- 139 Service users recognise the high quality of service delivery and express high levels of satisfaction with the services they receive. The tenants' focus groups all scored the service that they receive as very high and felt in particular that the condition of their houses was very good. The level of satisfaction with the overall housing service is among the best nationally and satisfaction with the repairs service is, at 99 per cent, extremely high. These high levels of satisfaction show that the council is providing the quality of service its customers require.
- 140 The council takes advantage of opportunities to build on existing work programmes. For example, when a property is empty, the kitchen layout will be changed if it does not meet the required standard. The council is also working with social services to minimise the need for disabled facilities' grants – as an example, grab rails are fitted as standard in sheltered housing schemes.

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

- 141 The council does not have SMART improvement plans for the DHS, progress on meeting the DHS is not systematically reported and there are no contingency arrangements to overcome potential barriers. However, the council has a good quality annual report to tenants together with clear service standards and has shown how it learns from itself and others. Overall weaknesses outweigh strengths in this category.

- 142 While arrangements for performance management are generally good the council is weak in the area of DHS. SMART action plans for ensuring homes meet the DHS are not yet in place and as a consequence there is no formal reporting of progress to tenants. The council has reported progress on meeting the DHS to its scrutiny panel but the DHS is not embedded in its performance management reporting framework. For example, the HRA business plan does not include meeting the DHS as an objective in the maintenance action plan. This lack of clear targeting together with the appropriate monitoring information will detract from the council's ability to focus on its key aim of delivering the DHS.
- 143 With the exception of DHS, there are clear customer standards across the housing service. A comprehensive and well laid out annual report enables tenants to assess progress against targets and to compare performance for the previous four years.
- 144 The council does not foresee financial barriers to meeting the DHS by 2010 providing the MRA allocation remains at its predicted levels. The council feels that difficulties may arise because of kitchen replacements being on an individual house basis (according to need identified by a poor layout) rather than street by street as this may not be perceived as equitable by tenants. There are currently no specific plans to overcome potential barriers to meeting the DHS.
- 145 The council has sufficient staffing resources to deliver its forward maintenance programme. Although the council initially had some difficulty in meeting the enhanced maintenance programme following the introduction of the MRA, it has recently been able to deliver the required work. The council did not have sufficient staffing resources in place at first to be able to utilise the additional finance available through the MRA, and in 2000/01 it underspent by £1 million. The council has now employed an additional four staff in the planned maintenance section. As a result the council met its programme fully (including the previous under spend) in 2001/02 and is on course to do the same thing during 2003/04.
- 146 The additional staff will also help the council address the backlog in its stock condition survey work. Against a target of 20 per cent per year, the council achieved 14 per cent in 2000/01, 10 per cent in 2001/02 and 6 per cent in 2002/03. However, the council is on course to meet its target for the current year.
- 147 The council learns from itself and others to generate improvements to its services. Examples include:
- ◆ The council was a founder member of the 'southern ten' benchmarking group of councils.
 - ◆ The council requested an external examination and report of its housing maintenance service and has introduced a range of improvements as a result (for instance improved arrangements for appointments for repairs).
 - ◆ A senior officer had a three-month secondment to a housing association.
 - ◆ The council is working with GOSE to improve the business plan to make it fit for purpose.
- 148 The council has also learnt from RSLs. For example, following a visit to an RSL, a time limit for kitchen replacements was specified using a multi-skilled approach. From a visit to another RSL the council improved the use of its computer modules for painting and gas servicing. These examples show that the council is prepared to learn from other service providers.

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?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear ambition and determination to meet DHS by 2010 • Culture of tenant involvement • Stock condition data base • Rigorous approach to assessing number of properties that fail DHS • Overall condition of stock • Positive progress with stock option evaluation • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No early tenant involvement in planned maintenance programme • Accurate assessment of the number of houses failing DHS not complete • Corporate procurement strategy does not embrace modern contractual principles • Business plan fails five out of ten 'fit for purpose' criteria
Is the council delivering its plans to meet the decent homes standard?	a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to meet DHS with available resources • Good progress in meeting the standard • Ability to deliver maintenance programme • Partnership contract for reactive maintenance • Very high levels of tenant satisfaction. • Takes opportunities to build on existing work programmes • Effective working between reactive and planned maintenance • Planned/reactive ratio meets good practice • Generally good partnership working with RSLs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional contractual approach to planned maintenance • No joint approach with RSLs on maintenance • No detailed review of budgets
How well does the council monitor its progress and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality annual report to tenants • Examples of effective learning • Staffing resources sufficient to meet deliver increased maintenance programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting of DHS not embedded in performance management framework. • No SMART plans to deliver DHS. • No contingency plans to overcome barriers.
Decent homes standard diagnostic assessment judgement	B		

Scoring key:

For each of the key areas looked at within the diagnostic assessments **the need for improvement**, based on 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?

- 149 The council is making good efforts to manage the physical environment. Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses and consequently there is a very low need for service improvement.
- 150 The quality of life of local people and the protection of the environment is part of the council's vision for the district and informs its primary aims. The corporate plan sets out the council's ambition to achieve a balance between social, environmental and economic factors in its activities. All reports to the cabinet, review panels and committees include a statement on the implications any proposals have on the environment.
- 151 The council is well informed on the quality of the local environment and the views that local people have about it. In the urban areas, a programme of six appraisals is being prepared for those conservation areas in the district where there is the greatest likelihood of commercial development pressure and therefore the greatest need for detailed design guidance. In rural areas, knowledge is gained from the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, which is joint funded by the council, and by special studies such as the coastal management plan and the contaminated land survey. The council undertook a sustainability consultation exercise with its citizens' panel two years ago and is planning another one this year. It is also working with the LSP to develop quality of life indicators.
- 152 There are good efforts by the council to protect and enhance the coastal and countryside areas. The council owns very little of the land in the countryside so it works with other agencies to protect and develop environmentally sensitive sites such as local nature reserves. It is a founding member of the New Forest Committee and is using its influence to shape the form of the proposed national park. The council also takes a lead role on coastal management in the region.
- 153 The council is improving public access to open spaces. Larger housing developments are required to make provision for open space and this has enabled a network of pedestrian and cycling pathways to be built in Totton.
- 154 There is good access to the council's buildings for people with disabilities. Only one of the council's 18 public buildings does not have access for people with disabilities, and there are plans to upgrade this in time to meet the Disability Discrimination Act deadline. There is disability awareness training for staff. The council has produced supplementary planning guidance on access for people with disabilities and has assisted in community initiatives to provide better access to facilities.
- 155 The council provides an effective development control service. The Audit Commission inspection of the planning service in 2002 concluded it was a good service. The inspection found that there is good public access to the service with quick processing of planning applications. In 2000/01, the percentage of applications determined within eight weeks was above the national average and the council has improved its performance since then. Customers can view, comment and track progress on submitted plans on the internet. The council's score against the national checklist of planning best practice compares with the best 25 per cent of councils, but customer satisfaction is below the average.

- 156 The council is using its development control powers to good effect to enhance the quality of the local environment. A sustainability appraisal of all policies in the local plan has been undertaken by the council. The council has also produced a wide range of supplementary planning guidance specifying the quality of design it expects from building developments. This ranges from general guides such as providing access for people with disabilities to site specific guidance covering things like the standards of urban design required in Totton town centre. The council also publishes free leaflets and guides to raise public awareness about design issues. A high proportion of development is on previously developed land.
- 157 The council is also using its development control powers to obtain extra facilities for the community. Section 106 agreements are used to secure additional public facilities from developers. For example, when new residential development of more than three dwellings is proposed, it is a planning requirement that developers provide public open space. There are also protocols covering cycle ways, car parking, affordable housing, play equipment and other community facilities. There is also a clear procedure for liaising with parish and town councils on Section 106 agreements.
- 158 The council commits its own resources to enhance the local environment and public facilities. There are many examples of environmental improvement schemes and more work is planned. Completed work includes town centre pedestrianisation schemes, coastal defences and new public conveniences.
- 159 The quality of parks and open spaces is high, although many of these areas are managed by parish councils rather than the district council. Resident satisfaction with them compares with the best 25 per cent of councils, and parish councils also rate them highly. Bathing water quality is generally good in the district and the three main bathing beaches meet the local Solent quality standard.
- 160 It is easy for the public to report maintenance defects in council owned facilities. There is a well publicised 24-hour hotline for the public to report defects. All calls are logged and actioned. However, complaints about service failures are not differentiated from service requests, which makes it difficult to monitor areas where the service needs to be improved. The council organises locality based walkabouts involving several public agencies visiting an area together. These are very visible and well publicised events aimed at identifying environmental problems.
- 161 Pollution control is effectively dealt with by the council. It has adopted an air quality strategy and air quality is regularly monitored in polluted areas and action taken where appropriate. One air quality standard area is about to be designated and local people are being consulted on how this is defined.
- 162 The impact of global effects on the local area is well understood by the council. The impact of sea level rise, adverse weather and climate change are an integral part of the strategies for coastal defence and land drainage. The council is a partner in the Hampshire climate change project and initiated the land drainage working group, which is now a national model.
- 163 The council is integrating sustainable development principles across all its activities by building it into its community planning and performance management framework. It has a green travel plan and minimises the impact its own activities have on the environment. For example, the council's public buildings have carbon dioxide reduction targets and these are regularly monitored. The council is developing its own in-house environmental management system for assessing the environmental impacts of its work.

- 164 The council does not offer a comprehensive service for dealing with statutory nuisances. The environmental health service is focusing on meeting its minimum statutory responsibilities. This means that discretionary services which enhance the service for customers are not widely available. There is no out of hours service for reporting public nuisances. Publicity aimed at preventing nuisances occurring by raising public awareness is used sparsely. However, enforcement is used for environmental health issues where necessary and the enforcement concordat is followed in these cases. Customer satisfaction with environmental health services is generally good.

Does the council help keep the locality clean?

- 165 The council is keeping the area clean and managing household waste and recycling effectively. Strengths outweigh weaknesses and consequently there is a low need for service improvement.
- 166 The council is actively pursuing a reduction in the amount of domestic waste going to landfill by promoting and providing facilities for recycling waste materials. The council offers kerbside collection of a wide range of recyclable materials to 96 per cent of its residents. There are also 88 recycling centres spread throughout the district and a materials exchange service on the council's website. Satisfaction rates for these services are among the best 25 per cent of councils. The council is planning to increase the range of recyclable materials collected from households next year.
- 167 Current performance on waste management is good in terms of the recycling rate. The council is part of the Project Integra partnership, which aims to provide a long-term solution to waste management in Hampshire. The partnership includes all the district councils as well as the county and two unitary councils. The council's waste recycling rate is among the best 25 per cent of councils nationally. It is also the second best recycling rate in the county.
- 168 The council provides support to other waste organisations operating in the district. This includes support for organisations that collect a range of materials such as clothing, fabric, shoes, books and furniture for recycling or re-use.
- 169 The council is effective in keeping the streets and other public spaces clean. The council provides clean streets and open spaces of uniformly high quality that meets national standards. There are high rates of public satisfaction with cleaning and few complaints. Most parish and town councils are also satisfied with the general level of cleanliness of their area. The council responds rapidly to cleaning hotspots and dealing with graffiti and fly-tipping. Abandoned vehicles are removed rapidly and almost immediately in designated areas to prevent them from becoming a target for arsonists.
- 170 There are good council organised initiatives aimed at preventing littering. An annual event, 'Pride in the Forest', is organised by the council and is aimed at raising the public's awareness of litter problems and getting their help in cleaning up problem areas. This scheme has received a national award. There are also regular articles in the council's newssheet on street cleaning.
- 171 The council is working with a neighbouring council in an innovative way which brings benefits to both parties. The council instigated a joint working partnership with Test Valley Borough Council for operational services which includes refuse collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance. The partnership has been operating for a year and aims to achieve cost and quality of service improvements for both councils. The scheme is receiving national recognition for its innovative approach to service delivery and is a government case study of best practice.

- 172 The council does not currently have a clear course of action to meet its statutory waste recycling targets. These are 33 per cent by 2003/04 and 40 per cent by 2005/06. The council's latest performance is 23 per cent, which falls below its own 25 per cent target for last year. The council is closer than average to meeting its targets compared to other councils but does not think it will meet this year's statutory target. It does not currently have its own waste recycling strategy which sets out how it plans to meet the statutory targets. The council recognises that it needs its own strategy and work on this has started. Although this is too late for this year's statutory recycling target, it will provide a plan of action to meet its target for 2005/06.
- 173 The prevention of garden waste entering the waste stream is not well developed. The council's efforts in this area only extend as far as offering subsidised home composting bins. The council has limited facilities for composting and does not offer this service to householders or to its own services which generate green waste. Even garden waste collected from households is disposed of in landfill sites. Consequently, the council is among the worst performing 25 per cent of councils for composting.
- 174 Efforts by the council to minimise the amount of waste entering the waste stream are not comprehensive. There are very few initiatives in this area although the quantity of household waste collected by the council is low and is increasing at a slower rate than the national average. The council recognises that it needs to do more work in this area and the proposed new waste strategy includes initiatives aimed at waste minimisation.

Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?

- 175 The council's work on community safety is highly effective. Strengths significantly outweigh weakness and consequently there is a very low need for service improvement.
- 176 Community safety is one of the council's four key priorities. Overall reported crime in the region is low but some categories of crime are increasing: motor vehicles, burglaries and violence. The importance the council attaches to community safety is demonstrated by there being a portfolio holder and a review panel with a single focus on crime and disorder.
- 177 The council has a clear understanding of community safety issues in its district. It has undertaken a wideranging community safety audit followed by public consultation on the findings. Hard-to-reach groups were specifically targeted in this consultation. The audit showed that 90 per cent of residents felt that they live in a relatively safe area. More specific studies which identify community safety issues, such as the participatory needs assessments, are also used to build up a picture of community safety issues. These targeted assessments focus on engaging the community in identifying social, environmental and community safety issues affecting the quality of life of people living in a geographical area. The community is encouraged to find local solutions to problems.

- 178 The council works effectively in partnership with others on community safety. It is a member of the New Forest community safety partnership with a number of other local public service agencies. The partnership is one of the more mature subgroups of the LSP. A senior manager and the portfolio holder for crime and disorder represent the council. The community safety officer, an employee of the council, co-ordinates the partnership's work. There is a clear separation of strategic and operational issues. The partners work effectively together to solve multi-agency problems, there is a data sharing protocol and pooling of resources.
- 179 Many national and local crime and disorder priorities are being addressed by the community safety partnership. Subgroups of the partnership focus on national key areas of fear of crime, drugs and domestic violence.
- 180 The community safety partnership engages effectively with the community on crime and disorder issues. Local people, through action groups set up by the partnership, address local problems. For example, the Ringwood youth action group organises Friday night football for young people at the council's leisure centre. The incidents of minor disorder and vandalism in the area have reduced as a result.
- 181 The council is making good efforts on initiatives to reduce crime and disorder in the district. There are many examples of initiatives aimed at reducing crime and disorder. CCTV is installed in three towns and one village. In the first year of operation, over 1,000 incidents have been recorded and it has provided evidence in 164 cases. The council has teamed up with the Bobby Trust and Bournemouth and West Hampshire Water to provide a home security check for people who feel vulnerable in their homes. Security equipment is fitted free in some cases.
- 182 Community safety is an integral part of the delivery of the council's services. For example, extra effort is put into cleaning areas where there are crime and disorder problems, and the planning service promotes 'Secured by Design' to developers. In response to an issue raised by the Forestry Commission, the district council has introduced a 'zap zone' where untaxed vehicles are removed immediately, before they become a target for an arson attack. Service plans feature community safety issues and all reports to the council's cabinet and review panels must state the community safety implications in the proposals. However, an audit all of the council's functions to assess the degree to which community safety issues are embedded in core services has not been done.
- 183 As well as local issues, the council is addressing national priorities such as antisocial behaviour problems and domestic violence. The council part-funds an acceptable behaviour co-ordinator who is line managed by the youth service. Acceptable behaviour orders and antisocial behaviour orders have been issued. The council also funds a domestic violence co-ordinator who is line managed by the police.
- 184 Publicising the work of the community safety partnership is limited. There is no annual report to show the public what progress is being made in meeting the partnership's objectives, what impact its work has had, or a plan of what the partnership plans to do next. However, the work of the group is widely publicised on a regular basis in the council's public newsletter, in news releases and information is contained in other public documents published by the council.

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

- 185 The council's provision of activities for young people is very good. Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses and consequently there is a low need for service improvement.
- 186 The council recognises the need to meet the needs of young people. Engaging with young people and identifying their needs is a primary goal of the council. The community strategy and performance plan have specific references to young people which set out the council's ambitions in this area. The priority the council affords to young people's issues is driven by the council's public consultation which confirms that it is a priority need. A specific sub-group of the LSP focusing on young people is currently being developed. Within Leisure Services, there are three development officers; sports and youth development, recreational development (special needs and elderly people), and play development.
- 187 The council understands the needs and aspirations of young people living in its community. Much of this knowledge is gained from direct contact with young people in delivering the council's services such as sports and play development work or through joint working with the county council's youth service. The council also undertakes consultation with young people on specific projects such as new skateboard parks and play areas. The wider collation of information about young people's needs is gained from the New Forest young persons' forum, a joint initiative between the council, Hampshire County Council and Connexions. In June this year, the council carried out a survey of young people aged 11 to 16 by working with eight secondary schools in the district. 750 young people responding to the survey said that they would like to become more involved in the work of the council which provides the council with a young people's citizens' panel for future consultation. The council also ran a 'voice of the child' initiative this year, which was sponsored by the national Children's Fund.
- 188 The council fosters partnerships with a wide range of providers and gives them grant aid to deliver its priorities for engaging young people in activities. Examples include the Pre School Learning Alliance and the New Forest Play Network, Forest Bus, Artsway, Forgeway and Community Arts. As a condition of grant aid these providers must offer outreach work and a focus on deprived neighbourhoods and isolated areas.
- 189 A good range of quality leisure activities for young people is provided by the council. An Audit Commission inspection of the leisure service in 2001 concluded that the council provides a good service and customer satisfaction is high. The council's five leisure centres are jointly provided with schools and offer a wide range of casual and instructed activities for children. There are activity courses, holiday activities, after-school clubs, parties, health and fitness and pre-school and crèche provision. Activities are predominately sports but do include dance and theatre. Use of the recreation centres by young people is high. Some facilities provided by the council came out of participatory needs assessments of local areas, such as a youth shelter, BMX track, play areas and skate park.

- 190 Some good initiatives aimed at improving access to facilities for young people living in rural areas are provided by the council. There is a moped loan scheme and a travel voucher scheme for young people to use on bus and taxi fares. During the summer holidays the council organise an outreach recreational activities programme called 'The Roadshow', which includes soft play, trampolining and games for children.
- 191 The council has clear policies and procedures for dealing with child protection issues but they are not applied across the organisation. The policy is directed at sports and leisure services only so it does not cover areas where employees may come into contact with children in other services. Guidance and training is provided on recognising abuse and what to do if it is suspected. Recruitment procedures cover child protection issues and the council screens job applicants and volunteers.
- 192 The council has a youth strategy but it is out-of-date and is narrowly focused on leisure services. The strategy is currently being rewritten but again the focus remains on leisure services rather than covering all the council's activities relating to young people. A best value review of children and young people is planned for this year.

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?	a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus and ambition on protecting the local environment • Knowledge about environmental issues • Efforts to protect the environment • Improving access to public spaces • Use of development control • Quality of public spaces • Pollution control • Consideration of global impacts • Integrating sustainable development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum service for dealing with statutory nuisances
Does the council help keep the locality clean?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kerbside waste recycling • Recycling centres • Customer satisfaction with waste collection and recycling • High waste recycling rate • Support for other waste organisations • Standard of street cleanliness • Litter prevention campaigns • Joint working with neighbouring council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited action plan to meet recycling targets • Lack of composting of green waste • Lack of initiatives aimed at waste minimisation
Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?	a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus and ambition on community safety • Understanding of local community safety issues • Partnership working • Engaging the community • Community safety initiatives • Integration of community safety into mainstream services • Addressing antisocial behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No annual report
Does the council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambition to engage with young people • Understanding of needs of young people • Support for other agencies • Activities for young people • Community engagement • Mobility schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrowly focused youth strategy • Child protection not mainstreamed across the council
Public space diagnostic assessment judgement		A	

Scoring key:

For each of the key areas looked at within the diagnostic assessments **the need for improvement**, based on 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

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

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

194 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).

Summary

Current performance

195 Overall, we found that New Forest District Council's HB and CTB service is providing a fair towards good performance. New Forest District Council's current performance demonstrates a number of strengths. These include:

- ◆ a history of successful service planning;
- ◆ a dedicated Training and Quality Team and history of investment in qualification training;
- ◆ operation of 8 local information offices;
- ◆ Customer Champion role with 48 hour response target for complex queries;
- ◆ New Claims interviews to improve customer service and processing times;
- ◆ Verification Framework compliant since June 1999;
- ◆ top quartile performance for all claims processing Best Value Performance Indicators; and
- ◆ history of successful action against benefit fraudsters.

196 However, there are some areas where New Forest District Council needs to develop further to fully meet the BFI and Department for Work and Pensions' (the Department's) Performance Standards framework. These include:

- ◆ procedures for Tax and Benefits Service not fully documented in manuals;
- ◆ no formal monitoring of customer services targets;
- ◆ claim forms do not follow the BFI model;
- ◆ no benefit take-up strategy;
- ◆ no evidence of monitoring performance against service level agreements;
- ◆ no strategy for managing landlord relationships; and
- ◆ not using blameless tenant overpayment recovery.

Proven capacity to improve

- 197 We assessed New Forest District Council's proven capacity to improve as good. New Forest District Council was able to demonstrate the following positive aspects:
- ◆ Beacon Council status held in 1999/2000;
 - ◆ a history of innovation and performance improvement;
 - ◆ identifying and responding to customer wishes; and
 - ◆ a history of reporting and monitoring against Best Value Performance Indicators.
- 198 However, the following areas led us to question the extent to which New Forest District Council was able to prove its capacity to improve:
- ◆ stronger links could have been made between corporate and service objectives; and
 - ◆ most 2005/06 Best Value Performance Indicator Targets have not been set to improve on 2004/05 performance.
- 199 We would like to thank New Forest District Council staff, particularly the Tax and Benefits Manager, for their assistance and co-operation with the assessment process.
- 200 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

- 201 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.
- 202 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.
- 203 The assessment for New Forest District Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 29 September to 3 October 2003.
- 204 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.