

Inspection report

October 2004



# **Comprehensive performance assessment**

**Stroud District Council**

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## Introduction

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

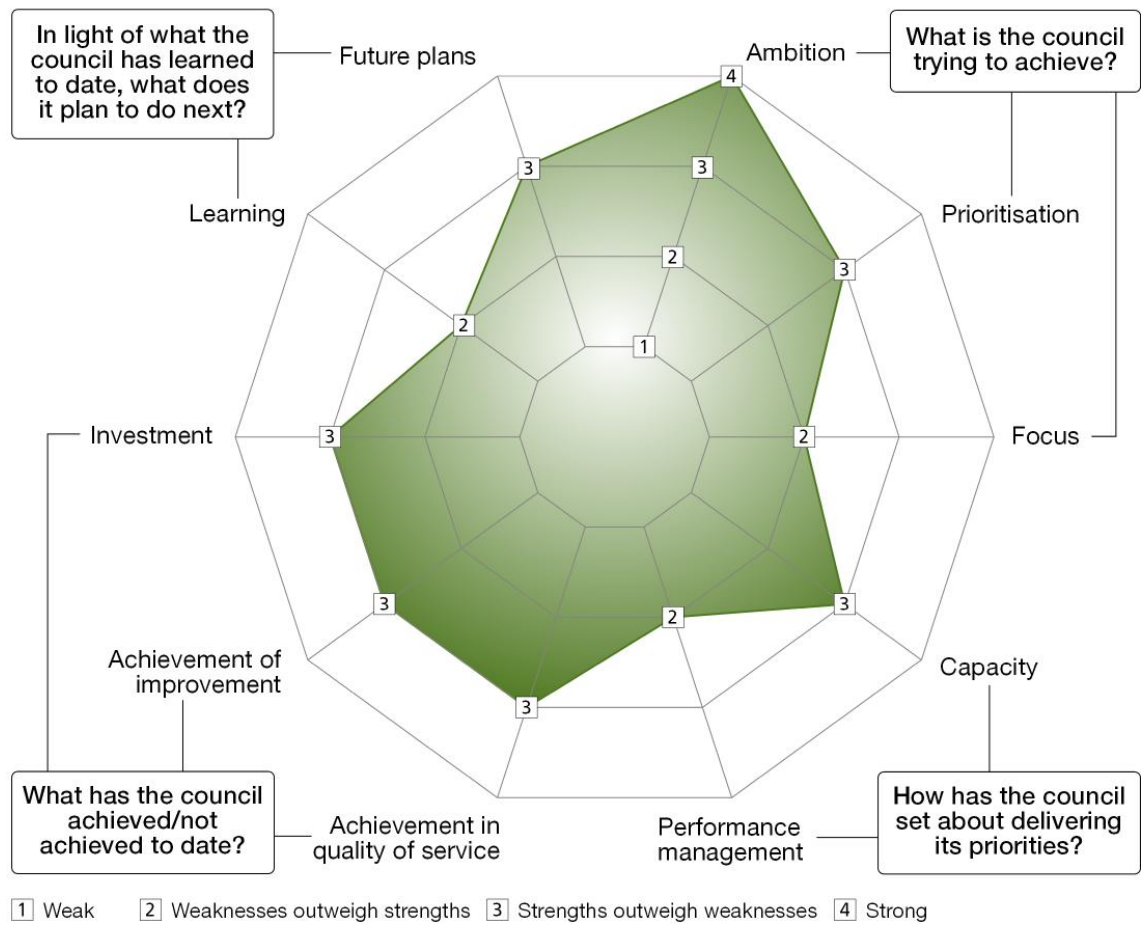
## Summary of Comprehensive Performance Assessment judgements

- 4 Stroud is a good council that is improving.
- 5 The council knows what it is trying to achieve and has communicated its ambitions and priorities well. It has formed positive relationships with partners and the local strategic partnership is developing an effective role. The leader and chief executive give good leadership to the local community and to the organisation.
- 6 The council is working well with partners to improve capacity, such as through joint funding or working together on bids for external funding. It is also building capacity through cultural change within the organisation. For example, restructuring and a successful management development programme has helped the council to break down the old departmental barriers and strengthen its corporate approach. A human resource strategy has been agreed but workforce planning is undeveloped. The council recognises that its approach to councillor training and development has been weak and it has recently launched a more structured programme, including special training for members of scrutiny committees.
- 7 The council is debt-free and has good financial capacity, although the tenants' vote against large scale voluntary transfer of the housing stock has left the council with a £17 million gap in the housing revenue account. Financial monitoring and reporting are good and the council has established a performance management framework that includes a standard template for service plans. But performance management generally is an area for improvement. Service plans are inconsistent in quality, targets are not stretching enough and few local indicators are used. Owing to weaknesses in performance management, the council does not keep focused on areas of poor performance. The council stays focused on big projects and schemes, but shows less attention to the detail of day-to-day operations. The lack of a performance management culture is also limiting the effectiveness of scrutiny and reducing opportunities for learning. The council recognises the need to improve its approach to learning across the organisation.
- 8 Most of the council's services are good and it is making noticeable improvements in priority areas such as community safety, regeneration, housing and customer care. It has achieved Beacon Council status for two service areas, as well as a number of other external awards. Its website has been assessed as one of the best in the country. Public satisfaction with some services, such as recycling, is high while in others, such as street cleaning, it is improving. However, public satisfaction with the council overall is relatively low. There are some areas of poor performance which are not improving, including the processing of planning applications and housing benefit claims.
- 9 The council is aware of these problems and has drawn up improvement plans. It is investing in these services, as well as in cross-cutting areas such as corporate approaches to procurement and risk management. It has some sound strategies in place, to enable it to achieve its ambitions. However, it lacks specific plans to achieve government recycling targets or to meet local requirements for new affordable housing.

## 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	2	2
How has the council set about delivering its priorities?	Capacity	3	3
	Performance management	2	2
What has the council achieved/not achieved to date?	Achievement in quality of service	3	9
	Achievement of improvement	3	9
	Investment	3	6
In light of what the council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	Learning	2	2
	Future plans	3	3
<b>Weighted score</b>			<b>43</b>
<b>Corporate assessment category</b>			<b>Good</b>

## Stroud District Council



## Recommendations

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

## Context

### The locality

- 11 Stroud district covers an area of 461 square kilometres, stretching from the flat Vale of Berkeley in the west to the Cotswold Hills in the east. The district has a population of 107,898 (2001 census), dispersed across a number of small towns and villages. The main towns are Stroud, Dursley, Nailsworth, Berkeley, Stonehouse, Wotton-under-Edge and Painswick. The population increased by 4 per cent between 1991 and 2001, and the profile is shifting from people under 45 to those over 60. The proportion of people describing themselves as other than 'white British' is low at 3.6 per cent.
- 12 Road and rail links are good, encouraging a net outflow of commuters to Bristol, Bath, Gloucester and Cheltenham. Although the number of large employers, particularly in manufacturing, is declining in the district, there is rapid growth in micro and small businesses. Agriculture continues to decline, now employing only 1.6 per cent of the working population. Unemployment is low, at 1.6 per cent (2003) and crime levels are relatively low. Overall, the area is affluent but there are pockets of deprivation. The district includes four of the most deprived wards in Gloucestershire and seven wards are ranked within the worst 20 per cent in England for access deprivation. Affordable housing is a continuing issue, with an annual shortfall of 300 homes. The ratio of average house price to income is high, at more than seven to one.

### The council

- 13 The council has 51 councillors – 27 Conservative, 11 Labour, 6 Liberal Democrats, 4 Green and 3 independents. In November 2001, the council introduced a new political structure comprising a leader-led cabinet of eight members. The two scrutiny committees – community services and regeneration and resources – are chaired by opposition councillors. Other committees cover standards, development control and regulation.
- 14 The chief executive has been in post since July 2001. The chief executive, two strategic directors, director of corporate services, two strategic heads and the monitoring officer make up the strategic team. Ten heads of service report to the strategic team. The council employs 603 staff (398 full time equivalents). The net revenue budget for 2004/05 is £12.9 million and the capital programme is £9.5 million. The council is debt-free and has £4.7 million in reserves. In December 2003, tenants voted against the large scale voluntary transfer of the housing stock.
- 15 The council carried out, as requested, a scored self assessment for this inspection against each of the corporate assessment themes. The self assessment was informed by a peer review commissioned by the council and undertaken by the Improvement and Development Agency in March 2004. This was a follow up to an earlier review in November 2002. Using the Audit Commission's scoring mechanism the council assessed itself as 'good'.

## What is the council trying to achieve?

### Ambition

- 16 Strong with few identifiable weaknesses.
- 17 The council is committed to the specific long term ambitions for the next 20 years that are set out in the district's community strategy. From this, the council has set out its own medium term ambitions for the district in its corporate delivery plan. The council's vision 'to make the district a better place to live, work and visit for everyone now and in the future' is backed up by seven corporate aims. These are to:
- ◆ prevent and reduce crime and disorder;
  - ◆ help those in particular need;
  - ◆ protect and improve the environment;
  - ◆ help build economic prosperity;
  - ◆ maintain and improve the community's health;
  - ◆ create and expand recreational and cultural opportunities; and
  - ◆ continuously improve the council's performance by providing 'best value' services.
- 18 In 2002 the council adopted five priorities: community safety, regeneration, citizen first, environment and housing.
- 19 The council's long term ambitions are realistic and robust. The corporate delivery plan for 2004-2008 shows the links between the community strategy, the council's vision and corporate aims, and sets out actions and performance mechanisms in the key areas. The plan is underpinned by a range of corporate documents, including strategies for each of the key priority areas, the best value performance plan and supporting strategies such as the marketing plan and capital strategy. This clear planning framework helps the council to ensure its ambitions are achievable in the longer term.
- 20 The council has clear ambitions for each of its priority areas, for example, for meeting the decent homes standard and for culture and regeneration. These ambitions are set out in separate strategic documents that underpin each priority. For example, the green spaces strategy establishes a vision for green spaces that has been agreed through extensive community consultation and includes strategic objectives and an action plan.
- 21 The council has developed its ambitions with stakeholders in the community through the local strategic partnership (LSP). The LSP is developing an effective role with good links to the county-wide Gloucestershire Strategic Partnership (GSP). The council's chief executive is an active player in the GSP and there are clear links between the ambitions of the county and Stroud LSPs.

The community strategy for the district states how progress will be monitored and how its objectives will be delivered. For example, it lists the quality of life indicators that it will be using and it states the delivery mechanisms for its objectives under each of its six key 'challenges'. This structured approach will help the LSP ensure that its ambitions are realised.

- 22 The council provides strong leadership both to the community and to the organisation. County and regional partners consider that the council has set a clear agenda for the future and that it has a good awareness of both regional and local issues. Partners view the council as providing good leadership and engagement with the community. The council has been actively working towards improving relations with town and parish councillors. The leader of the council and the chief executive have a good working relationship and together provide effective leadership.
- 23 The council has a number of innovative equalities/diversity initiatives to help ensure that its ambitions are applicable to all its residents. A large majority of staff and councillors have been through a diversity training programme and the council recently worked with partners to stage a community-based Islam awareness-raising event. It has also set up a diversity panel involving representatives from different parts of the community who will review service plans and give feedback on these to service heads.
- 24 The council has not clarified how its plans for tourism link to its overall vision for the district. The self assessment identifies tourism as a key economic issue as the district's tourism potential has not been realised. The council has developed a tourism action plan but the planning framework does not show how this links to the council's corporate aims and its priorities of regeneration and environment. For example, the council has not stated how it plans to resolve any tensions between regeneration/economic development and preserving the countryside and promoting tourism. This lack of clarity in how the council's tourism strategy fits in with its corporate priorities means that there is the risk that the council may progress tourism in isolation from other areas.

## Prioritisation

- 25 Strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 26 The council has made clear what its priorities for improvement are. These are set out in corporate planning documents and referred to in service plans.
- 27 Priorities have a sound basis and show a balance of local and national issues. Priorities are clearly linked to the district-wide community strategy and take account of national issues such as community safety and tackling the fear of crime. However, the council has not prioritised the achievement of national recycling targets. The council has developed its priorities using research data from the county council's research database (Multi-Agency Information Database for Neighbourhoods), and feedback from the local community. It has well established and effective consultation mechanisms such as the annual residents' telephone survey, four yearly household surveys and the youth council. It has also recently set up a citizens' panel. In this way the council has a good overview of current concerns and is able to balance national and local issues.

- 28 The council has clearly communicated its priorities to councillors, staff, tenants, residents and partners. It has used a variety of internal and external communication methods. Externally, these include the youth council, the councils' quarterly newsletter for residents, the tenants' newsletter and the council's website. Internal means of communication include councillors' bulletins, 'Proud of Stroud' sessions for staff which were initially led by the chief executive, e-news bulletins and 'The Hub' intranet site. Effective mechanisms exist for two-way communication – such as regular team briefings and one-to-one sessions – where staff are encouraged to feed back on priorities and other corporate issues. A staff suggestion scheme has also been introduced. All these means of communication help ensure that employees have ownership of priorities and that feedback is built into future prioritising exercises.
- 29 The council is targeting resources against most of its priorities. The council's priorities are reflected in its medium term financial plan. An annual efficiency savings exercise has led to the identification of a total of £3.2 million for revenue re-allocation between 2002 and 2006. Resources from these efficiency savings, together with redeploying staff and securing external funding, are targeted at priorities. For example, by allocating additional resources to community safety, the number of staff in the service has significantly increased. However, the resources available for affordable housing are reducing. In 2002/03 the council invested £487,000 in local authority social housing grant (LASHG). In March 2003, the government changed the rules applied to LASHG, but despite being debt free, the council allocated only £350,000 to LASHG in 2004/05. In 2005/06, this amount reduces to zero.
- 30 The annual efficiency savings exercise is not resulting in significant shifting of resources out of non-priority areas into priority ones. Efficiency savings are carried out across the board in all services, and then money is put back into some of these services. This may result in duplication of effort in priority areas.
- 31 The council has not clearly identified or communicated what are not its priorities for improvement. While the council has listed some non-priority items in its self assessment, such as the backlog of health and safety inspections and the appointment of an arts development officer, the basis for this selection is not obvious to all. The council has not communicated these non-priorities clearly to councillors and staff, and backbenchers have not been fully engaged in discussions about what are not the priority service areas for improvement.
- 32 Although the council has had some effective consultation mechanisms in place for a number of years, the lack of central co-ordination has limited the council's ability to gain maximum benefit from the resources used or the information collected. Much of the consultation activity has been department-based. A corporate approach is at an early stage of development. Although the council has been taking action to improve communications with town and parish councils, in the CPA survey one third of parish councils felt they had not been consulted by the council. They also felt that the council does not consult sufficiently with all sections of the community. There has been no comprehensive district-wide analysis of young people's needs and, as a result, the council cannot be sure that the views of all groups are fully represented through its consultation processes.

## Focus

- 33 Weaknesses outweigh strengths.
- 34 The council is not using its systems and mechanisms effectively to identify and act at an early enough stage to improve areas of poor or declining performance. For example, performance in the planning service has been deteriorating for the past three years. Yet weaknesses have not been addressed in service plans and an improvement plan has only recently been produced. This lack of focus has resulted in action not being taken quickly enough to address the problems.
- 35 The council has not been consistently focusing on day-to-day operations while concentrating on larger, outward facing schemes. For example, it has been successful in drawing in external or joint funding, yet it is poor at rent collection. It leads the Gloucestershire Electronic Partnership but it has not provided adequate support to prevent a significant decline in service while implementing new information technology (IT) systems, such as in the revenues and benefits service. These examples illustrate that while the council is good at thinking 'big', looking externally and finding innovative ways to develop services, it has not concentrated on the detailed implementation of some of its plans. As a result there have been some reductions in service levels and some schemes have not reached their full potential.
- 36 Scrutiny is not contributing effectively in helping the council maintain focus on improvement. Meeting agendas and minutes indicate that committees do not focus on the council's priorities. A large number of cabinet decisions have been called in and meetings have tended to focus on minor operational issues. 'Hot topics' identified by the scrutiny committees for further investigation have been based on the concerns of scrutiny members and their constituents, rather than corporate issues. While some hot topics are linked to council priorities, such as the recent investigation into tenants' experiences of housing refurbishment, scrutiny is not yet taking a consistently strategic view.
- 37 The council has a range of mechanisms in place to help it sustain focus. These include an established meetings structure, regular reporting of performance information and staff appraisals. Both the strategic team and the executive board operate to a four monthly agenda planning cycle, and each head of service is scheduled to attend a strategic team meeting every six months to discuss their service plan.
- 38 The council can point to some examples demonstrating sustained focus over time on things that matter to local people. These include a number of major regeneration projects, such as redeveloping the Stroud bus station to provide a cinema complex. This project is providing the facilities identified through consultation as the most desired by local people.

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

### Capacity

- 39 Strengths outweigh weaknesses.

- 40 Over the last three years the council has implemented a number of changes to increase its capacity and skills. These changes have achieved a cultural shift within the organisation, with improved internal and external communication, a sharper focus on corporate working and structured training and development for officers and councillors.
- 41 Partnership working is strong. Partners describe relationships with the council as open, consultative and exemplary. The council works well with partners to increase capacity and deliver complex priorities - at regional, county and neighbourhood levels. For example, it leads the Gloucestershire Electronic Partnership which, through shared funding and co-operation, is helping the council to bring about service improvements in support of its citizen first priority. Through the Stroud LSP, the council is working successfully with others to access external funding for a range of projects, such as Digital Stroud that is encouraging older learners to use IT. The council works well with voluntary groups, including tenants. It is strengthening its relationships with parish and town councils, with whom it is supporting some joint projects – such as a one-stop-shop at Wotton-under-Edge.
- 42 The council is open to exploring alternative methods of service delivery. For example, the neighbourhood wardens, which are funded jointly with town and parish councils, contribute not only to community safety but also report on other issues of public concern such as fly-tipping and dog fouling. Capacity is also increased by ensuring that community safety is integrated into the work of other departments. The council uses best value reviews effectively to consider how it delivers services. For example, the council's car parking review resulted in choices to retain the service in-house, or to externalise it to a private management company or to a partnership composed of key stakeholders.
- 43 The council is debt free and its level of reserves is good. Overall the auditor has scored financial standing as adequate, although auditors have consistently criticised the council for regularly underspending on its general fund. The council has managed effectively the financial impact of the 'no' vote in the LSVT ballot. It has revised its investment programmes to meet the potential £17 million shortfall in its housing revenue account. However, it still faces the challenge posed by the small award of planning delivery grant in 2004/05 because of poor planning performance.
- 44 Officers and councillors are clear about what they are responsible and accountable for and working relationships are generally good. This has been achieved through a number of communications initiatives, such as 'working together' seminars for councillors and officers. Expectations are also clearly set out in an officer/member protocol and a new member/member protocol produced by a probity working group. The council has established an effective standards committee and taken other appropriate steps to implement the new ethical framework, for example, written guidance and training sessions for councillors. Meetings are well managed and there is a good attendance of backbench councillors at cabinet meetings, where they are encouraged to contribute.
- 45 Training and development, together with other human resource (HR) initiatives have increased capacity and skills amongst both officers and councillors. The council first achieved Investors in People several years ago. The management development programme, covering nearly all senior and middle managers, has been particularly successful at increasing management capacity and is highly regarded by both the participants and outside assessors. All councillors have

been provided with laptop computers and they speak highly of the IT support received. The self assessment recognises councillor training and development as an on-going area of weakness, characterised by an ad hoc approach. A more structured programme, introduced in 2004/05, is already bringing positive results. For example, scrutiny members are reviewing their forward programme to ensure a more strategic approach.

- 46 As part of its change programme, the council has been moving towards a more strategic approach to HR management. It has a clearly set out HR strategy and action plan, that includes the intention to review and increase its range of HR policies, several of which are out-of-date. The council is currently extending its capacity in this area by engaging a consultant to undertake this work. The council is committed to achieving work/life balance for its staff and commissioned a working life survey in 2003 to investigate staff concerns in this area. A new flexible working policy is being trialled and has already had a positive impact in one service area that was experiencing staff shortages. The revised recruitment process is contributing to high quality appointments.
- 47 Workforce planning is not in place. There is no corporate recruitment strategy to ensure consistency, for example, in the area of market salary supplements. Staff shortages and vacant posts are having a detrimental effect on service levels in some sections. Problems are being exacerbated during the implementation of new IT systems and the council's in-house IT support unit is not been used to full effect. For example, in the planning service specialists have been taken away from their planning work in order to implement the new IT system.
- 48 Staff morale is being adversely affected in a few teams. For example, the LSVT vote inevitably caused uncertainty amongst housing staff. Staff shortages in some sections, such as planning, are also contributing to the pressure. Delays in the communication of some key corporate decisions, such as those concerning the management re-structuring, have caused concerns to staff. The working life survey concluded that over half of the workforce perceived high workloads and poor communication regarding change as beginning to cause problems. However, the survey results were slightly better than the overall local government comparison score, indicating that the scale of the problems at Stroud were not dissimilar to other councils.

## Performance management

- 49 Weaknesses outweigh strengths.
- 50 The council's performance management systems are not operating effectively across the organisation. In its self assessment, the council acknowledges that it has more to do to ensure that its approach is embedded in all service areas. It introduced a revised template for annual service plans this year to ensure a common structure. The new template has strengthened the link between long term corporate ambitions and short term service priorities and actions. However, it has not achieved a consistent quality. Plans vary in coverage and level of detail, and do not all follow the guidance issued with the template concerning risks, planned consultation and equalities assessments. Resource implications are not stated and actions focus on inputs rather than outcomes. Not all plans include current targets and those that do are not stretching or linked to the performance levels of best performing councils. In addition, some are not consistent with national targets. Plans with inappropriate targets cannot be used effectively as tools for improvement.
- 51 Limited use is made of performance indicators (PIs) to drive improvements even though quarterly reports on best value performance indicators (BVPIs) and progress against local targets are considered by the strategic team, scrutiny and cabinet. Portfolio holders also meet regularly with service heads to discuss progress. The content of the BVPI reports has recently been improved to include comparative information about the performance levels of the best performing councils. However, given the inadequacy of many of the local targets, senior managers and councillors are still not receiving a full picture of performance across the council. In addition, there have been problems with the accuracy of BVPI data in the past. A number of BVPIs have been qualified, making year on year comparisons difficult. Local PIs are not well developed in many service areas. For example, the green spaces strategy does not include any user satisfaction or local qualitative indicators, or means of measuring partner achievements. However, there are pockets of good practice - such as the HRA business plan - which includes a sound performance management element.
- 52 Council systems and processes are not fully effective in assisting performance management. For example, some departmental recording systems cannot give performance data against some targets – such as those for fly tipping. The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) notes the need for better performance information. Service standards are undeveloped and the council's website contains little information on the levels of service that the public can expect. Work on customer care standards, for application across the council, is at an early stage of development. The council has been looking at its complaints system, which has been the focus of one of scrutiny's 'hot topics'. However, the council does not have a corporate approach to the management of customer requests, comments or complaints which feeds effectively into the performance management framework. Project management and the role of scrutiny need further development, as acknowledged by the council in its self assessment. Overall, the limitations of the current systems are reducing the impact of performance management in driving improvement outcomes.

- 53 The council has a risk management strategy and a risks register but it has more to do to embed risk management within its systems and culture, as acknowledged in the self-assessment. Risks are not being routinely assessed in corporate strategies and service plans.
- 54 The council has good financial monitoring and reporting systems. It maintains careful control over spending on capital projects. The auditors have scored financial statements as better than adequate. Procurement practice has been assessed as satisfactory through an IDeA health check. However, performance monitoring reports do not include information that can be used to demonstrate value for money.
- 55 The council's performance management framework links corporate priorities through to service plans and objectives for individual staff members. The staff appraisal system is well regarded and understood, and is effective in identifying both job and development objectives. In this way, the scheme helps staff to know what is expected of them and managers to know if they are achieving it.

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

### Achievement in quality of service

- 56 Strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 57 The council is providing some good services with 75 per cent of BVPIs scoring above the median in 2002/03. Of these, 35 per cent were in the best 25 per cent of councils nationally. Only 8 per cent were in the worst 25 per cent. The 2000 best value public satisfaction survey showed that public satisfaction was high with some individual services. However, satisfaction with the overall service provided by the council was relatively low at 64 per cent. This result was close to the predicted figure based on deprivation, but satisfaction was below the median compared with other councils. Achievements in quality of service are set out below against the council's five key priority areas.

### Community safety

- 58 Crime levels are below national averages, although fear of crime is above the regional average and rose between 2001 and 2003. The council works well with partners to deliver community safety. Along with two other Gloucestershire districts, it was awarded Beacon Council status for crime reduction in rural areas in 2002/03. Partners consider that the council provides good leadership in this area with positive results for local communities. Partners see council initiatives targeted at older people and at young people as best practice. For example, its work with young people includes outreach work in schools and a campaign on internet safety, and it has a proactive approach to child protection. In 2003/04, the council (jointly with Cotswold district) was awarded Beacon Council status for services to older people, which include a community safety element. Recently, the council has received the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents Gold Award for its work in improving occupational health and safety.

### Regeneration

- 59 Planning service performance is poor. Over the past two years the council has not been meeting government timescales for deciding planning applications. Performance on land search timescales was also poor in 2002/03. The council has not made best use of planning agreements to maximise the financial contribution that developers make to implement improvements in priority areas. In other services under this priority area, the council has been more successful. For example, it provides good quality sports and leisure facilities. It works effectively with town and parish councils to support rural and market town regeneration, with completed projects including a rural skate park at Cam and the renovated town hall at Berkeley.

## Citizen first

- 60 In delivering its customer focus strategy, the council has implemented a number of successful projects. For example, since February 2003 it has been operating a joint one-stop-shop facility with Wotton Town Council providing coordinated information and advice to the public. The council has made good progress towards making its buildings accessible to people with disabilities. In 2002/03 it was in the best 25 per cent of councils with 60 per cent of buildings compliant with standards and it is scheduled to be fully compliant by the end of 2004. The council's website has been awarded the highest category in the 2004 survey by the Society of Information Technology Management and assessed as in the top 20 best developed local authority websites. Particular benefits to the public are the wide range of on-line interactions and the links to other public and voluntary sector websites. The benefits section, as a key public-facing service, scored well on public satisfaction rates (2000/01). However, PIs show poor performance in the correct processing of claims. The BFI points out weaknesses in claims processing, but judges the service as 'fair' overall.

## Environment

- 61 The council has been through a number of external assessments that indicate achievements in this area. Environmental health and environmental contracts services have been assessed as 'good' by Audit Commission inspectors. The council can demonstrate long term commitment to sustainable development. For example, it has achieved the standards of the Eco Management and Audit Scheme which requires services to maintain delivery but minimise their impact on the environment. BVPIs show good levels of performance. Indicators of the amount of waste collected per head, the percentage of population served by kerbside collection of recyclables and the percentage recycled are all in the best 25 per cent of councils (2002/03). However, satisfaction with waste collection and street cleaning were both below the median in 2000/01.

## Housing

- 62 The council's housing stock is in generally good condition and the council is on target to meet the decent homes standard by 2010. It is providing an effective homelessness service and the BVPI shows top 25 per cent performance on the average number of weeks spent by homeless households in hostel accommodation. Partners praise the council's mediation service for helping to reduce homelessness. BVPIs show that the proportion of rent collected is low. Compared with the net annual requirement of 300 affordable homes, indicated by the latest housing needs survey, the council has achieved low levels of affordable housing – approximately 25 each year.

## Achievement of improvement

- 63 Strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 64 The council is achieving improvements in all of its priority areas. However, performance indicator information shows a mixed picture. BVPIs for 2001/02 and 2002/03 show that for the 23 indicators where comparisons can be made, 7 (30 per cent) improved while 16 (70 per cent) did not improve. Of those that did not improve, 12 indicators (75 per cent) were already above the median.

Only two indicators in the worst 25 per cent of councils can be compared with previous years and these did not improve (correct processing of benefits cases and the percentage of non domestic rates collected). Council unaudited data for 2003/04 shows that 40 per cent of BVPIs improved, 33 per cent stayed the same and 14 per cent got worse. Unaudited results from the 2004 public satisfaction survey show overall satisfaction as relatively low at 56 per cent, reflecting a national trend.

### **Community safety**

- 65 Considerable improvements have been achieved in this area. The development of the neighbourhood warden scheme in partnership with parish and town councils is making a visible contribution to community safety. The trial scheme was so well received by local people that the programme has been extended and now covers six areas. The council has also been tackling anti-social behaviour and has recently appointed an additional officer to take this work forward. Effective enforcement action has resulted in a 100 per cent decrease in calls to the police in two streets and an 80 per cent decrease in another. Partners praise the council's multi-agency approach to helping young people at risk of an antisocial behaviour order.

### **Regeneration**

- 66 Significant regeneration schemes, often in partnership with others, have brought improvements for local people throughout the district. However, there are some weaknesses under this priority. Major regeneration projects include a business development that provides approximately 200 new jobs, the canal restoration and the redevelopment of a large industrial site in Dursley for mixed employment and housing. Work is also underway on the £10 million cinema complex in Stroud that will provide facilities most desired by local people. In addition, the council has implemented other, smaller improvements such as environmental enhancements for pedestrians and community transport schemes. In 2004, for the first time, the council achieved Green Flag status for its main park in Stroud. The district museum has benefited from an on-going improvement programme and the introduction of free entry has led to a 120 per cent increase in visitors. The council has recently completed a £1 million refurbishment of its main leisure centre in Stroud and more people are using it. However, attendances at other leisure centres across the district have reduced over 2003/04. Performance in the processing of planning applications continues to be poor and declined against government targets between 2002/03 and 2003/04.

### **Citizens first**

- 67 Customer care is improving across the council, although there have been continuing weaknesses in a key customer facing service - revenues and benefits. The council is developing new, improved customer access points. For example, it has provided a self-help interactive kiosk at a parish council office which has full access for disabled people and provides computer access to council services and the internet. Improvements are being made to the accessibility of the benefits service. These include an officer visiting the homes of those who cannot attend the council offices and a team member being trained in sign language. BVPIs show that processing times for benefits claims have been deteriorating since 2001/02. Rent collection also declined in 2003/04.

However, the council is investing in the revenues and benefits service and BFI has judged its proven capacity to improve as 'fair towards good'.

## Environment

- 68 Council services show both strengths and weaknesses in this area. Against the national trend, public satisfaction with street cleaning has increased. In 2000/01 performance was below the median compared with other councils while unaudited figures for 2003/04 show that it is now within the best 25 per cent. The council is not improving its performance significantly on recycling and waste management. The volume of waste collected has increased and the council has failed to meet government recycling targets for 2003/04. Recycling in 2003/04 marginally improved to 20.8 per cent from 20.5 per cent the previous year but this fell well short of the government's target of 26 per cent. This means that the council is not well placed to achieve the next target of 36 per cent in 2005/06.

## Housing

- 69 Substantial progress is being made towards meeting the decent homes standard and in reducing the cost of keeping warm. In April 2002, 32.8 per cent of council owned homes did not meet the standard. By April 2004, following major investment in more than 700 properties, only 19.5 per cent were below the DHS. A programme of loft and cavity insulation has been completed, all 5,000 council owned homes will have double glazing by next year, and a major programme of asbestos removal is underway. In the Cashes Green area, over 100 homes have been refurbished, incorporating environmental and community safety measures. Tenant satisfaction with the housing service overall has moved from below the median in 2000/01 to above the median in 2003/04 (unaudited). The council is also working to reduce the number of empty private properties and to improve private housing conditions. During 2002/03, council action resulted in 35 out of 1,460 empty houses being returned to use and 4 per cent of unfit private homes were made fit. Although the council is not achieving the number of affordable homes required, it has delivered some high quality housing schemes in partnerships with registered social landlords. For example, it has worked with a housing association to convert a derelict mill into eight three and four bedroom houses in a conservation area near the centre of Dursley.

## Investment

- 70 Strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 71 The council is investing in improvement building blocks that address existing gaps. These building blocks are already bringing about change. Investments include: increasing corporate capacity through management restructuring, building partnerships, improved internal communications mechanisms, and a staff training programme that includes the management development programme, training for supervisors and the European Computer Driving License. The council recognises that it needed to strengthen its arrangements for member development and support, and is implementing a more structured programme. This includes an improved induction programme and compulsory training for members of scrutiny, development control and the licensing and regulation committees. Feedback from these training events has been positive.

The next stage is to implement personal development interviews for councillors, using an external consultant.

- 72 The council has key corporate strategies and policies in place. These include risk management, procurement and human resources strategies and the performance management framework. Implementation of these strategies is underway. For example, risk management is being developed through a group involving champions for each service, and training for councillors is scheduled. A first step towards achieving consistency in the implementation of the performance management framework has been work to ensure the accuracy of performance indicator data. Equalities policies are being implemented through corporate initiatives and service plans. For instance, the housing strategy includes plans that address the needs of black and ethnic minority communities and homeless young people.
- 73 The council has a clear medium term financial plan in place to guide its investment decisions. Implementation of a new financial management system in 2005 is on target. This new system will bring benefits in terms of showing commitments as well as daily expenditure. In addition, it will help support the full implementation of the corporate procurement strategy. The council is also investing in IT to support service priorities and auditors have reported on the progress made in implementing e-government. BFI notes the investments in IT hardware and software, together with additional staff, that are bringing improvements to the benefits service.
- 74 The council is securing resources to invest in priority areas. For example, it has obtained £723,000 from Government Office for the South West (GOSW) for community safety. In partnership with registered social landlords, the council has been successful in attracting £8.5 million for affordable housing, in return for a council contribution of £850,000 over two years. Substantial additional resources from rental income are being invested in the housing revenue account (HRA) capital programme from that originally planned. However, the council lacks the resources to maintain the long-term viability of the HRA.
- 75 The council is open and responsive to external and internal challenge. For example, it seeks external assessments through peer reviews and national awards and accreditation schemes. Internally, effective use is made of best value reviews, which also include an external challenge element. Recent reviews have resulted in significant improvements for the public, for example, a £550,000 investment programme in public conveniences.
- 76 Some of the council's building blocks are at an early stage of implementation and their action plans are not consistently SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely). In addition, resource implications have not been set out in all plans. The council acknowledges in its self assessment that it has more to do to maintain its financial stability by improving risk, procurement, best value and project management processes.

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

### Learning

- 77 Weaknesses outweigh strengths.
- 78 The council is not yet learning consistently, across the organisation, from its successes and failures. In its self assessment, the council acknowledges that it needs to take more time to evaluate initiatives, partnerships and performance. These issues were highlighted in the peer review, liP assessment and the CPA peer challenge. The weaknesses in performance management reduce the effectiveness of learning. The council uses PI data to monitor performance but the lessons from both good and poor performance are not captured and shared within the organisation. This reduces the opportunities for the council to learn from its own experience.
- 79 The council lacks a systematic approach to the sharing of learning and good practice across services. For example, there is no formalised programme to encourage staff exchanges between departments or regular lunchtime seminars to promote learning. In its self assessment, the council acknowledges that it needs to be more structured about how it learns from others and how it transfers best practice internally and externally.
- 80 The council's self assessment demonstrates mixed levels of self-awareness. It acknowledges corporate initiatives that require further work to fully embed them in the organisation – such as risk and project management. However, the self-assessment does not fully discuss what the council's weaknesses are in service delivery or the challenges it faces. Weaknesses in services linked to corporate priorities are barely mentioned, other than in an analysis of BVPIs. For example, the assessment does not fully acknowledge the challenges faced by the council in meeting its targets for affordable housing. Poorly performing service areas are not specified in the council's summary of its strengths and weaknesses.
- 81 The council is improving its approach to learning and it learns well from others, through partnerships, county networks and other councils. For example, partners cite the community safety partnership as very effective in sharing learning. Working towards Beacon Council status has involved close working with other district councils and learning from them. Gaining the awards has also placed the council in the position to be able to advise others. Officers are involved in a wide range of networks and benchmarking clubs, and they are learning from the feedback received from user groups, such as one set up for development control. Informal sharing of learning across the organisation is beginning to happen, through the management development programme and the cross-service customer care group.

## Future plans

- 82 Strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 83 The council has some robust future plans in place to achieve its priorities. The council's corporate delivery plan with its underpinning hierarchy of corporate strategies and plans helps to maintain focus on achieving the council's ambitions. Most of the high level actions within the corporate delivery plan include target dates or milestones and the plan includes evaluation mechanisms for each priority area. Individual strategies support the council's corporate aims. For example, the regeneration and culture strategy expands on the corporate vision and aims and explains how these translate into the regeneration and culture service areas. Some of the council's future plans have also been externally validated. For example, the council's asset management and capital programme were assessed as good by GOSW.
- 84 The council has plans in place to address poor performance in service areas such as planning and rent collection. The council's marketing plan is an example of a well structured plan that tackles areas where the council has not achieved what it wants to. For example, the plan sets out the actions the council will take to increase overall public satisfaction levels. Actions are set out with performance measures, lead officers, resources, milestones, key outcomes and means of review and evaluation.
- 85 The council has engaged well with partners and the community in developing future plans through the LSP. The council consults stakeholders in developing its strategic plans. For example, a final phase of consultation of the council's regeneration and culture strategy included an information evening for councillors when they were invited to make an input into the strategy.
- 86 The council regularly reviews its plans to fit changing circumstances. The community strategy is reviewed annually to take account of changing local and national priorities. Following from this, the council reviews its own priorities and the corporate delivery plan, taking note of its own consultation exercises and research. Corporate strategies are also regularly reviewed. For example, the HR strategy is to be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains relevant to internal and external changes and to the council's aims and objectives. The failure to transfer the housing stock to a registered social landlord in December 2003 has necessitated a major review of the housing strategy. The council has enlisted the assistance of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and its tenants in undertaking a second option appraisal which will determine the future of the housing stock.
- 87 The council lacks some key plans, such as an adopted local plan. Work commenced on this before 1997, but adoption is not expected until 2005. Although the absence of a plan impacts on the drawing up of the local development framework, the late adoption of a local plan means the council will have an up to date planning framework that will help it to catch up. The council also does not have any firm plans to deliver the step changes needed to achieve government recycling targets. It has missed the government targets for March 2004 and without a plan in place there is the risk that the council will miss future recycling targets.

- 88 Although the council's medium term financial plan sets out the resources needed to deliver future plans, there is no central co-ordination of the council's strategies to assist in the scheduling of key pieces of work. Strategies and their associated action plans are not easily accessible in one place for monitoring purposes. Action plans are inconsistent in quality and detail. Some action plans, such as for the green spaces strategy, lack milestones and clear outcomes. This strategy lists key actions, timescales, lead agencies and partners. However, actions are often input rather than outcome focused, timescales are vague and it is not clear whether actions are costed and resourced to ensure that they are achievable.
- 89 The council lacks specific plans to support its priority of affordable housing since the government changed the rules applied to local authority social housing grant. The interim policy statement (IPS) sets thresholds for the provision of affordable housing on new residential developments. The new IPS is dependent on the level of new building in the district and the council's policies being upheld at any planning inquiries.

## Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long term vision set out in the community strategy</li> <li>• Short/medium term ambitions clearly stated and backed up by plans</li> <li>• Clear ambitions for priority areas such as the decent homes standard</li> <li>• Strong leadership from the top to the community and the organisation</li> <li>• LSP developing an effective role, with good links to GSP</li> <li>• Imaginative equalities/diversity initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of clarity in how tourism plans fit with overall vision for the district</li> </ul>
Prioritisation	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear priorities linked to community strategy and based on public feedback, local and national agenda</li> <li>• Priorities reflected in medium term financial planning</li> <li>• Resources from efficiency savings, staff redeployment and external sources targeted at priority areas eg community safety</li> <li>• Priorities well known and understood</li> <li>• Improved internal and external communications systems</li> <li>• Established consultation mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-priorities for improvement not clearly identified or communicated</li> <li>• Reducing resources for affordable housing</li> <li>• Consultation uncoordinated and corporate approach undeveloped</li> </ul>
Focus	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range of mechanisms in place to sustain focus</li> <li>• Some examples of sustained focus over time eg Stroud bus station re-development to cinema complex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mechanisms not used effectively to focus on areas of poor performance</li> <li>• Reduced attention to detail of day to day operations and implementation while focusing on high profile issues and schemes</li> <li>• Scrutiny not helping to maintain focus on improvement</li> </ul>
Capacity	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debt free</li> <li>• liP</li> <li>• Management development programme bringing tangible results</li> <li>• Thorough approach to implementation of new ethical framework</li> <li>• Good internal working relationships supported by new protocols</li> <li>• Alternative methods of service delivery, including neighbourhood wardens adding value</li> <li>• Strong partnership working</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low award of planning delivery grant</li> <li>• Staff shortages and vacant posts affecting capacity and performance in some areas</li> <li>• Workforce planning and recruitment strategy not developed</li> <li>• Inconsistent support for implementation of new IT systems</li> </ul>
Performance management	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established performance management framework, including template for service plans</li> <li>• Regular reporting of performance data</li> <li>• Staff appraisal scheme well regarded and effective</li> <li>• Good financial monitoring and reporting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of stretching, meaningful targets</li> <li>• System/process limitations reducing impact of performance monitoring in driving improvement</li> <li>• Inconsistent quality of service plans</li> <li>• Few local performance indicators</li> <li>• Limited use of service standards</li> <li>• No corporate approach to using customer comments, requests for service and complaints</li> <li>• Project management underdeveloped</li> <li>• Risk management not well developed</li> </ul>

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement in quality of service	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 75 per cent of 2002/03 BVPIs above the median, with 35 per cent in the best quartile</li> <li>• High public satisfaction with some services</li> <li>• Achievements against priorities eg Beacon Council status for older people's services &amp; community safety in rural areas</li> <li>• Other external awards, such as EMAS, RoSPA, award winning website</li> <li>• Environmental health and environmental services assessed as 'good' by AC</li> <li>• Some areas of good performance eg recycling, waste reduction</li> <li>• Effective homelessness service</li> <li>• Implementation of DDA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low public satisfaction with overall service</li> <li>• Some areas of poor performance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- processing of planning applications</li> <li>- time taken to process housing benefit claims</li> <li>- land searches</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Low levels of new affordable housing</li> <li>• Low levels of planning gain through S106 for priority areas</li> </ul>
Achievement of improvement	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substantial progress towards meeting DHS including major installation and asbestos removal programmes</li> <li>• Improvements in all priority areas eg: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- neighbourhood warden service</li> <li>- new public access points</li> <li>- new or refurbished community facilities</li> <li>- Green Flag award in 2004</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Significant regeneration schemes</li> <li>• Increased public satisfaction with street cleaning</li> <li>• High quality affordable housing schemes in partnership with RSLs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 out of 23 BVPIs did not improve between 2001/02 and 2002/03</li> <li>• Performance in some customer-facing service areas has deteriorated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- planning processing</li> <li>- housing benefits claims</li> <li>- rent collection</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Not meeting government recycling improvement targets</li> </ul>
Investment	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in a number of building blocks eg re-structuring, corporate strategies, member development, MTFP, partnership building, IT</li> <li>• Investment in priorities and in poorly performing services</li> <li>• Open and responsive to external and internal challenge, including BVRs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some building blocks at early stage of implementation with action plans not consistently SMART</li> <li>• Lack of resources to maintain long-term viability of HRA</li> </ul>
Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning through partnerships, county networks and other councils</li> <li>• Some informal sharing of good practice between services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inconsistency in learning from successes and failures</li> <li>• Lack of a systematic approach to sharing learning and good practice across the organisation</li> <li>• Weaknesses not fully explained in self assessment</li> </ul>
Future plans	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some robust future plans</li> <li>• Clear hierarchy of plans</li> <li>• Asset management and capital programme assessed as 'good' (GOSW)</li> <li>• Regularly reviews its plans</li> <li>• Engages partners &amp; community in planning for the future</li> <li>• Plans to address poor service performance eg planning, rent collection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of adopted local plan</li> <li>• No plans to achieve government recycling targets</li> <li>• Some action plans to deliver corporate strategies lack milestones and clear outcomes</li> <li>• Lack of specific plans to support priority of affordable housing after abolition of LASHG</li> </ul>

**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?**

- 90 Very low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.
- 91 The council has very clear ambitions for the future of the housing stock which are set out in the latest housing strategy and in the corporate delivery plan. The housing strategy draws upon national and regional priorities. It is intended that all 5,000 plus council homes will attain the decent homes standard by no later than 2010. The council and its tenants would have liked to reach a higher standard than the DHS, but because of financial constraints and the 'no' vote to stock transfer in December 2003, the council has had to reduce its programme. Elements such as bathrooms and kitchens will only be replaced where not to do so would result in that property failing the standard.
- 92 The council's housing ambitions are not limited to meeting the DHS, but have regard to other national and local priorities. These include improving home security, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, energy efficiency, tenant participation (TP), and improving the environment. The council is reducing crime and improving security on the estates through the 'safer estates project' and the 'bogus callers initiative'. The specification for items such as replacement external doors has been upgraded to ensure a higher degree of security. The council is active in working with tenants and Gloucestershire Constabulary in tackling antisocial behaviour by providing closed circuit television (CCTV) and crime reduction programmes. CCTV has also been installed in sheltered housing. The programme is particularly successful in Cashes Green in effecting crime reduction with a close partnership between residents, council and police.
- 93 Environmental improvements are carried out to a high standard in accordance with tenants' proposals and there is an environmental fund that is allocated by the Tenants' and Residents' Forum. A number of estates have been improved through tree and shrub planting and this has reduced ball games being played in unsuitable areas.
- 94 Energy efficiency and affordable warmth is high on the agenda with the council's performance in the best 25 per cent of authorities for SAP rating (standard assessment procedure). By 2005 all council owned homes will have double glazed windows which will improve further their energy efficiency.
- 95 The council has clear ambitions to work closely with its tenants. It is particularly looking at the question of diversity to ensure equality of access to the housing service. Through the housing forum, tenants are involved in developing the council's housing ambitions and capital works programmes. The forum comprises nine elected tenants nominated through the Stroud tenants' and residents' forum and nine councillors. Any housing decisions have to be discussed first at the housing forum before going to cabinet. Tenants are well represented through the two forums, local tenants' associations, sheltered housing panels and the 'village voice' groups. Over one third of all tenants and leaseholders are represented by a recognised tenant organisation.

- 96 The council is taking steps to ensure it meets the requirements of equalities legislation. It will fully comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) by October 2004, with easy access to all housing offices and to the common parts of sheltered housing schemes including lounges and other shared facilities. At the time of inspection these improvements were almost complete. In partnership with the county, an occupational therapy team has been established to help meet the needs of tenants with a disability. The council's housing landlord service complies with the Commission for Racial Equality's code of practice for rented housing and all staff have recently undergone diversity training.
- 97 The council's ambitions for its stock are consistent across services and strategies. These include the community strategy under the auspices of the LSP, the corporate delivery plan, the current procurement strategy and the asset management plan.
- 98 The council has very good quality, accurate information about its housing stock. The data is derived from an in-house stock condition survey in 2001 and a subsequent 10 per cent internal and external survey by external independent surveyors as part of the development of the housing transfer proposal. This stock information was fully validated in preparation for the large scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) ballot in December 2003. The council's interpretation of the decent homes standard has also been checked by the government office. The stock condition data can be queried by address and is regularly updated by the council's consultants.
- 99 The latest survey revealed that in January 2003, 28 per cent of the council's dwellings failed the DHS. A separate but concurrent survey of the council's remaining non-traditional dwellings revealed that the 103 Woolaway system-built properties alone required work valued at £3.7 million, and overall £5.35 million will be required over the next 30 years.
- 100 Good quality information is held giving details about all structural elements such as roofs, chimneys and windows. These records provide an indication of when any individual element will result in the home failing the DHS.
- 101 The council has good asbestos records and has written to all tenants about the presence of asbestos, which is mainly limited to external asbestos cement in corrugated roofs, and rain-water goods where the risk is very low. The council has worked successfully with local media in ensuring that tenants are not alarmed by the news of the asbestos removal programme.
- 102 The council has good quality information about future need for its housing. It has found that demand for social housing remains strong in Stroud as owner occupation is becoming less affordable to families on average incomes. On the basis of the 2003 housing needs survey update, the council estimates that at least 300 additional affordable homes are required annually. The HRA business plan provides details of housing supply and demand on a parish basis. To assist with provision, the council has substantial programmes to refurbish and reinstate its large stock of homes of non-traditional construction.

- 103 The council has fully evaluated a range of options which would enable it to achieve the DHS and other housing objectives. Between 2002 and 2003 a housing stock option appraisal (SOA) was undertaken with the assistance of consultants and an independent tenant advisor (ITA) appointed by Stroud's tenant representatives. The appraisal concluded that LSVT was the best and only long-term financially viable option available. In agreement with the tenants, and their ITA, a review of the assumptions that underpinned the housing options appraisal was undertaken by an independent housing consultancy. The review found that no more reasonable assumptions could be made. The Audit Commission undertook a two stage review of Stroud's SOA and found that it had been undertaken in accordance with current good practice. An organisational assessment was also carried out of the impact that transfer would have on the financial stability of the council. This impact assessment found that in the worst case, the net annual cost to the council's general fund (GF) would be £750,000.
- 104 Tenants have been fully involved in working with the council in developing the housing transfer proposal and the associated prospectus. The transfer offer would have not only led to the attainment and future adherence to the DHS, but would also meet tenant aspirations for the preservation and improvement of services. The proposal included many aspects of the new community gateway model which is currently being developed by the ODPM.
- 105 A special housing consultative working group of around 20 tenants was set up to oversee the SOA and the development of the proposal for transfer. The establishment of this group ensured that tenants in favour of and those against transfer were represented throughout the process.
- 106 As part of the housing options appraisal a full sensitivity analysis was undertaken including considering the risks of a 'no' vote in the ballot. A second full housing options appraisal is now underway which will have to be signed off by GOSW by July 2005. In the short-term the cabinet has agreed cuts in expenditure in the budget to ensure that the HRA remains viable until around 2012/13 and that the council attains the DHS for all its homes.
- 107 There are robust plans in place to deliver decent homes by 2010. In 2002, GOSW judged the HRA business plan not 'fit for purpose,' but it did assess the plan as 'above average'. The council expects the business plan to be fit for purpose by July 2005, the delay being caused by the need to undertake a second stock option appraisal because of the 'no' vote on transfer last year. The housing strategy was also assessed as 'above average' and the council expects to submit a new strategy to GOSW in November 2004 with the intention that it should be 'fit for purpose' by January 2005. The housing needs survey was updated by consultants in late 2003 and demonstrated an annual requirement of 300 additional affordable homes.
- 108 Because of the failure to transfer all homes to a registered social landlord (RSL), the council has had to revise its capital programme reducing the extent of replacements and renewals to a minimum to meet the standard. At a meeting of the housing forum in March 2004, the tenants were advised of the shortfall in capital resulting from the decision not to transfer the housing stock. The consultants advised that the council needs to spend £58.7 million for the capital programme over the six years to 2010. As only £41.7 million is likely to be available, it has been necessary to cut the programme by £17 million.

This has been achieved by reducing the extent of work to a minimum but still ensuring all properties meet the standard by December 2010.

- 109 The council's current standing orders do not allow for modern forms of procurement such as strategic partnering. However, the housing team has offered to run a pilot contract based on partnering principles to see if other forms of contracting would yield benefits for Stroud residents.
- 110 The council's asset management plan (AMP) and capital strategy take full account of the need to provide sufficient resources to meet the DHS and at the same time provide routine maintenance. The housing strategy sets the framework for investment in the housing stock and links to the AMP. The two housing service plans are integrated with both the housing strategy and the HRA business plan with SMART action plans. However, these have not been developed with stakeholders.

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

- 111 Very low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.
- 112 The council has had limited success in maximising its capacity to deliver decent homes by making substantial revenue contributions to capital outlay (RCCOs). In the approved 2004/05 civic budget, the capital financing statement provides for £3.407 million in HRA funded work, equating to 22 per cent of all rental income. However, no HRA generated, or general fund capital receipts are being invested in the HRA capital programme. The council is debt free and is projecting gross HRA receipts from the sale of council houses in the current year of around £3 million. Under new rules it will be able to retain and reuse about £2.4 million subject to this being used for affordable housing together with 100 per cent of any general fund capital receipts. As affordable housing is one of the council's five priorities, it is surprising that no portion of the £3 million receipts from the sale of houses is being reinvested in the HRA capital programme. The high use of RCCOs, although contributing substantially to the HRA capital programme, will result in the housing revenue account being non-viable at an earlier stage than otherwise anticipated.
- 113 In identifying resources available, service charges are evaluated annually, as are the recharges to the general fund for costs such as grounds maintenance. This annual evaluation ensures that costs are fairly apportioned and that the annual sale of around 45 council houses is fully accounted for. There is also an annual evaluation of the main budget headings in the HRA including a review of management costs, service level agreements (SLAs), and the costs of office accommodation.
- 114 The council has fully prioritised the use of its resources in accordance with the consultants' recommendations and in line with the reduced available capital following the 'no' vote. The tenants have been advised of the impact of the reduction in capital works. The new capital programme is realistic and robust. The council and its consultants remain certain that, despite these constraints, sufficient funds will be available to meet the standard.

- 115 Staff members have received comprehensive training in project management and the contracts section has recently been restructured to ensure that the capital works budget is managed effectively. To improve capacity the council works closely with its RSL partners and shares training opportunities where appropriate. As a way of improving value for money, term contracts are used. However, the housing service has not yet entered into any strategic partnering arrangements for large capital contracts or for the two response repairs contracts.
- 116 The housing capital programme is developed jointly with tenants and members through the housing forum. All investment plans must pass through the forum before going on to cabinet and, where relevant, to full council. To date, contractors have not been involved in developing the plans.
- 117 The capital investment plans are well formulated taking account of those houses that do not meet the DHS currently and those that will become non-decent before 2010. There is a 30-year projection for the housing revenue account indicating that the HRA will not be viable after financial year 2012/13.
- 118 With the help of tenants, the council has established a lettable standard to which all vacant properties are improved before reletting. The programme maximizes opportunities when homes are vacant ensuring that they meet the DHS before reletting. The cyclical maintenance programme also takes account of the DHS, with boilers being replaced with modern condensing boilers for which the council receives a grant from the local energy supplier. All homes were provided with central heating by 2002. The window replacement programme will be completed by early 2005 and this will reduce the painting programme in future years.
- 119 In accordance with government best practice guidance, a multi-disciplinary team arranges for adaptation work to council homes to be carried out sensitively and promptly. Gloucestershire occupational therapists are seconded to work in the housing service ensuring a consistent and effective service. The council also works closely with the Energy Advice and Grants Agency (EAGA) for the delivery of WarmFront and other energy efficiency grants.
- 120 The council has delivered its HRA capital programmes over the past three years on budget and on time. In 2003/04 the council achieved 94.9 per cent expenditure against budget. This small annual underspend is planned to provide flexibility for any unexpected expenditure, such as winter storm damage.
- 121 The council has worked to the national target for reduction in the number of non-decent homes between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2004. At 1 April 2002 only 67.2 per cent homes met the DHS but by April 1 2004 80.5 per cent of the council's housing stock met the DHS. The rate of improvement to meet the standard places the council in the best performing 25 per cent of councils.
- 122 Resident satisfaction with completed work has not been routinely assessed but will be from September 2004. However, tenants with councillors and officers do sit on the maintenance focus groups that agree specifications, contractor tender lists, and monitor contracts. Any contract more than 5 per cent over budget has to be reported to cabinet and the council works to a standard of no more than 5 per cent of properties having defects at practical completion. At least 10 per cent of all capital work is post inspected and in major works, such as bathroom replacement, 100 per cent is inspected.

123 The investment programme for elements such as roof replacement or central heating boiler renewal is informed by, and links to, repair history. Tenant representatives expressed satisfaction with the council's repairs service, it being particularly effective when the requested repair was of an urgent nature. The gas appliance servicing programme is efficient with almost 98 per cent of appliances inspected and serviced within the previous 12 months. Tenants are given choices in the work to be done. This is all part of the pre-contract consultation procedure. Action plans contained within the 2002 HRA business plan and housing strategy have generally been met and these have been updated through the two housing service plans which are reported on quarterly to the strategic team and then to scrutiny committee.

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

124 Low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.

125 The council has a very well developed system for monitoring and managing performance. The council is appointing a housing asset manager as part of the restructuring of the housing contracts team, who will act as the council's decent homes officer.

126 As well as working to the two best value performance indicators specific to decent homes, there are a series of local performance indicators which link to the two housing service plans for the housing management service unit and for the housing strategy division. There are quarterly reports to the two housing cabinet portfolio-holders, the housing forum and scrutiny committee and six monthly reports of progress against the action plans to the strategic team. Budget management is through the maintenance focus groups and any overspend is reported there and to cabinet. Service standards are contained within the standard form of contract used for capital works.

127 Risk management was a key part of the first stock option appraisal which included a 'Plan B' should there be a 'no' vote. The council's consultants, GOSW, and the ODPM's Community Housing Task Force are all now assisting stakeholders prepare for a second stock option appraisal due to be completed by July 2005.

128 Despite continuous improvement being one of the council's seven corporate aims, it is only partially successful in learning from its own experience and implementing change as a result. There has been no best value review of the housing service as it was decided that as the first stock option pointed clearly to the need to disinvest of the council's housing stock, it would be better to carry out a BVR following transfer. A best value review of the total housing service is now planned to be carried out concurrently with the second stock option appraisal between August 2004 and July 2005.

129 Tenants are surveyed after all repair jobs but this process is only being extended to 100 per cent of capital works in September 2004. However, the council does capture learning from experience by involving tenants in the housing maintenance focus group in planning, developing and monitoring the capital investment programme. Before staff members attend training events, objectives are set and there is an evaluation of the benefits of the course and what can be learnt by the organisation.

The council undertakes research to ascertain best housing practice and regularly uses reports of service inspections published by the Audit Commission. Learning is shared with housing partners, particularly the RSLs.

### 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?	a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very clear ambitions for improving the condition of the housing stock and meeting the DHS</li> <li>• Affordable warmth high on agenda</li> <li>• High priority and investment in TP and in tackling anti-social behaviour</li> <li>• Housing forum involved in developing ambitions and capital programme</li> <li>• Ambitions consistent across council</li> <li>• Good quality stock data, including structural elements and asbestos</li> <li>• SOA fully evaluated a range of options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRA not viable long-term</li> </ul>
Is the council delivering its plans to meet the decent homes standard?	a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High investment in the council's stock</li> <li>• High level of RCCOs contributing to capital programme</li> <li>• Service charges &amp; recharges to the general fund reviewed &amp; adjusted annually; capital investment plans well formulated</li> <li>• Resources fully prioritised in accordance with the consultants' recommendations</li> <li>• Investment plans go to housing forum before cabinet</li> <li>• Maximises opportunities when homes are vacant</li> <li>• tight budgetary control, rate of DH improvement best quartile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debt free but resources not fully maximised; no HRA or GF capital receipts going to 2004/05 capital programme</li> <li>• No concluded plans for small number of system built homes</li> <li>• Traditional procurement – no use of strategic partnering</li> </ul>
How well does the council monitor its progress and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well developed system for monitoring and managing performance</li> <li>• Dedicated project team for contracts exceeding £0.25m</li> <li>• Tenants involved in planning, developing and monitoring the capital investment</li> <li>• Undertakes research to ascertain best housing practice using RSLs, partners, and AC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only partially successful in learning from own experience and implementing change</li> <li>• no housing best value review</li> </ul>
<b>Decent homes standard diagnostic assessment judgement</b>	A		

#### Scoring key:

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

a = very low

b = low

c = high

d = very high

## Appendix 2 - Public space diagnostic assessment

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

- 130 High risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.
- 131 The council has been slow to put in place an appropriate planning framework for the district. Stroud has never had an adopted local plan in spite of work commencing before 1997. Continual political and staff changes are cited as the main reasons. The latest draft version dates from October 2000 and was subject to a public inquiry in 2003. The inspector's report is awaited in September 2004 and adoption is expected during the summer of 2005. The absence of an adopted plan has impacted on decisions and appeals as the council has lacked a firm basis for its decisions. It is also currently delaying work on the local development framework (LDF) which will succeed the local plan process. However, the late adoption of a local plan will mean that the council has an up to date planning framework that will help the council to catch up.
- 132 The council has adopted only a limited amount of draft supplementary planning guidance (SPG) to promote its environmental priorities. Draft SPG was issued in 1999/2000 for a residential design guide, landscape assessments, and outdoor open space provision in connection with residential development. SPG has also been produced for specific sites such as the housing development at Ebley Wharf. However, SPG has not been developed in a number of areas such as green spaces, public art, transport and canal restoration. Overall, the council lags behind other councils in this regard.
- 133 As a consequence the council is not making best use of section 106 agreements to secure developer contributions to fund improvements in its priority areas. The council can demonstrate that planning gains have been made in areas such as education and play spaces but the section 106 process, its monitoring and the general direction it is taking is unclear. The council recognises that it has not always been effective in the past in its use of section 106 and is working on improvements in 2004 that will include production of SPG that will set out expectations and procedures.
- 134 The council has been slow at deciding planning applications and its performance has deteriorated in each of the last three years in each of the three categories monitored. Stroud is one of 22 local planning authorities listed by the ODPM as poor performers. The percentage of major applications decided in 13 weeks fell from 35.1 per cent in 2001/02 to 30.6 per cent in 2002/03 and again to 16.1 per cent in 2003/04 (against a national target of 60 per cent). The corresponding figures for minor applications in eight weeks were 63.6/52.4/37.5 per cent respectively (against a national target of 65 per cent) and for other applications in eight weeks they were 73.9/69.9/53.4 per cent (against a national target of 80 per cent). These figures for 2003/04 rank the council 354th, 347th and 354th respectively out of 362 local planning authorities. As a consequence Stroud is one of nine councils listed by the ODPM as a Best Value Performance Authority for 2004/05, which means the council will be under close scrutiny to see that the service improves.

- 135 The council is working to improve its performance in planning but progress has been slow. Officers only drew up a performance improvement plan for the service as recently as June 2004. Also, the council's capacity to improve is diminished by a small award of planning delivery grant from the government. The council has only received a small award of £79,000 in 2004/05. This is based on the council's current performance and is considerably less than most other councils. Performance slipped largely due to staff shortages and problems experienced during the implementation of a new IT system for the planning service, now mostly overcome. Further IT improvements to give the public on-line access to planning services are to be implemented, working with the Gloucestershire Electronic Partnership. Lessons have been learnt from past mistakes and this time project management systems will be used to keep the project on track. Initial signs of change in planning performance are encouraging and the first quarter performance for 2004/05 shows a significant improvement.
- 136 The council has a strong commitment to the environment. One of the council's five corporate priorities is to 'protect and improve the environment, with particular emphasis on the district's green spaces'. It has adopted a Green Spaces Strategy, with a vision, agreed through extensive consultation, 'to place the importance of green space at the heart of key decisions and to collectively provide, manage, maintain and recreate a green environment that improves the quality of life for all'.
- 137 The council can demonstrate a long term commitment to sustainable development. It signed up to a countywide Local Agenda 21 strategy in 1996 and adopted its own environmental policy in 1998. The community strategy takes a long term view of the economic, social and environmental issues that the district faces. Stroud is one of only a small number of councils to obtain independent accreditation of its environmental management systems against the European Union Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) which it achieved in 1999. In addition, it achieved ISO 14001 in 2000.
- 138 The council has a good understanding of the main issues and opportunities within its area. It is working in partnership with the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council and a number of parish and town councils to carry out health checks and audits that are being used to draw up town and parish plans across the district. The council is helping this work by providing profiles of the area and offering advice.
- 139 The council aims to improve the quality of the environment when it carries out its own schemes. Recent examples include the refurbishment at Stratford Park, the development of the Museum in the Park, the forecourt to the Subscription Rooms, car park enhancements in Stroud and Nailsworth and street furniture in Stroud and Dursley. In 2004, the council has achieved Green Flag status for Stratford Park. The council is also supporting businesses through a well subscribed scheme to improve the appearance of shop fronts by offering improvement grants up to £2000.
- 140 The council is making good progress towards achieving its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in regard to the accessibility of its buildings. In 2002/03 60 per cent of council buildings were accessible, placing the council in the best 25 per cent nationally. It has carried out an audit of the work needed to make the remaining buildings fully compliant and is funding an improvement programme that is scheduled to achieve this in the autumn of 2004.

- 141 The council deals effectively with pollution, noise and other nuisances. Air quality has been assessed and initially this led to a joint declaration of an Air Quality Management Area (ACMA) with Tewkesbury Borough Council. Further surveys have confirmed that air quality is within acceptable limits and the ACMA order has been rescinded. On-line data on air quality is available on the council's website from survey stations in Stroud and Minchinhampton. The environmental health service was assessed as 'good' following an Audit Commission inspection that covered responsiveness to service requests, including those made out of normal working hours.

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

- 142 Low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.
- 143 The council works in partnership with other councils to ensure that waste is managed in an integrated and sustainable way. Along with the county council and the other five districts in Gloucestershire it developed a joint municipal waste management strategy in 2002. More recently the council has been working towards a more formalised partnership arrangement and has signed a statement of intent to form the Gloucestershire Waste Partnership by April 2005. The council is committed to this but with the reservation that any joint action should not be against the interests of Stroud residents. The Gloucestershire partnership has been successful in attracting £1.6 million of funding for waste projects.
- 144 The council performs well on recycling and waste collection. A kerbside collection service is provided to residents across the whole of the district. At 21 per cent in 2002/3 the recycling rate was within the best 25 per cent nationally. Satisfaction with recycling facilities is high at 77 per cent, also in the best 25 per cent. The volume of waste collected is consistently in the best 25 per cent and although it is rising, it is increasing at a lower rate than national trends.
- 145 The environmental services provided by the council were assessed as 'good' following an inspection by the Audit Commission in 2001. The council has improved the service since then by acting upon a number of the points raised. For example, the kerbside recycling service now covers the whole of the district and public toilet standards are being improved through a £550,000 programme of improvements that is under way.
- 146 Against the national trend, public satisfaction with street cleaning has increased. In 2000/01 performance was below the median compared with other councils while unaudited figures for 2003/04 show that it is now within the best 25 per cent. The council has targeted localised problem areas such as Stroud town centre where it has worked with partners to jointly fund an enhanced cleaning regime which includes street washing. It is also working more closely with the county council to ensure that district activities such as litter picking and street cleaning are better coordinated with highway activities such as grass cutting and gully emptying.
- 147 The council performs well in dealing with abandoned vehicles. The number of abandoned vehicles has increased by 46 per cent in the last three years and in 2002/03 972 vehicles were dealt with. The council has set targets to investigate 80 per cent of reports within 48 hours and to remove 80 per cent of vehicles within 48 hours of this being permissible. It is currently achieving 81 per cent and 84 per cent respectively.

The council is also piloting a fast track process, in partnership with the police and fire service to remove burnt out, stolen and abandoned vehicles within 24 hours of being reported.

- 148 The council is acting to deal with dog fouling, the issue most commonly identified as a 'big problem' in resident surveys. Its dog warden service promotes good practice and responsible dog ownership by giving talks and attending events approximately 40 times a year. In 2003/04 it invested £10,000 to provide a further 49 poop-scoop bins, bringing the total to 250 in the district. Two successful prosecutions have been made against dog fouling in the last two years.
- 149 In other areas the council is only taking limited enforcement action to promote a cleaner environment. Fly tipping is increasing but there have been no prosecutions in the last two years and measures such as CCTV have not been used. However, the council will be making greater use of the neighbourhood warden service as it is extended across the district. Wardens will, for example, be involved in regular litter picks, removing fly posters and reporting abandoned vehicles.
- 150 Despite its good record for recycling the council failed to achieve the government's target for 2003/04. Having improved from 16.7 per cent in 2001/02 to 20.5 per cent in 2002/03 the council only marginally improved to 20.8 per cent in 2003/04, falling well short of the government's target of 26 per cent.
- 151 The council does not have any firm plans that aim to deliver the step change needed to meet future government recycling targets. The council's targets are to increase recycling to 22 per cent in 2004/05, 23 per cent in 2005/06 and 24 per cent in 2006/07. If these are achieved the council's performance will still not have achieved the government's target for March 2004 and will miss the March 2006 target of 36 per cent by a considerable amount.
- 152 The council has no plans to introduce a kerbside composting collection service but prefers to minimise waste collection by focusing on home composting through the sale of compost bins at subsidised rates. A scheme has been in place for some time but the council has not been monitoring its effectiveness. The council has made a bid for government funding to allow 3,000 extra compost bins to be given away for free but cannot calculate the likely benefit.
- 153 The council is beginning to develop service standards and targets that are challenging but its performance monitoring systems are not yet set up to give suitable data to assess performance against service targets. For example the council aims to clear fly-tipping within 24 hours but it cannot easily calculate how well it is performing. A manual check for the inspection showed that the target was achieved in 75 per cent of cases, with an overall average time of 1.7 days. Also only a limited number of standards are clearly stated and accessible to the public, though the council is working on developing this further.

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

- 154 Very low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.
- 155 The council is providing effective leadership on community safety and is a committed member of the Stroud Crime and Disorder Partnership (CDP). Community safety is one of five corporate priorities of the council and its aims and priorities are clearly set out in the CDP's Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy for 2002/05. This is supported by an action plan.
- 156 The council has received external recognition for its work on community safety. It achieved Beacon Council status for crime reduction in rural areas in 2002, in partnership with Tewkesbury and Forest of Dean district councils. Further recognition has been given in 2004 by also achieving, in partnership with Cotswold District Council, Beacon Council status for its services to older people. Much of the work assessed within this category related to community safety initiatives which address the needs of older and vulnerable people.
- 157 The council has enhanced its capacity to improve community safety by introducing a neighbourhood warden scheme. This provides a uniformed presence within communities to help people to feel safer. Wardens assist in dealing with anti-social behaviour and reporting issues of public concern such as graffiti, abandoned vehicles and damage to premises. Police arrests have been made as a direct result of intelligence provided by wardens. They add capacity not just to community safety but also to other areas that cause public concern such as litter, dog fouling and fly tipping. The scheme was initially trialled in Cam and Dursley, with the support of parish and town councils. Due to its success it is now being extended across the whole district. The scheme is wholly funded by the council and town/parish councils, without any central government financial support.
- 158 The council has effectively mainstreamed community safety across all of its services. The action plan that supports the CDP strategy for 2002-2005 clearly shows the actions that will be taken by each department of the council in support of the key objectives. These actions are also reflected in annual service plans. The community safety service therefore receives strong support across the whole range of council activities and community safety is well integrated with other work being undertaken.
- 159 The council has taken effective action to deal with anti social behaviour. For example it has worked with other partners to implement a range of measures in Cashes Green such as improved lighting, use of mobile CCTV, landscaping and the removal of a wall where young people were congregating. Three young people on the estate have been subject to anti social behaviour orders (ASBOs) and a further three have signed up to non legally binding acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs). Surveys undertaken three months before and after on three streets affected showed a 100 per cent reduction in calls to the police from two streets and 80 per cent reduction from the other. The council's approach to assisting young people 'at risk' of an ASBO through a planned multi-agency approach is identified as good practice by partners in Gloucestershire.

- 160 Community safety is well resourced by the council. The council has shifted resources to match the priority it gives to community safety. By reallocating efficiency savings, redeploying existing staff and securing external funding the council has increased the size of the community safety service from 1.5 full time equivalents in 2001/02 to 16 full time equivalents in 2002/03. This is a very large team compared to the rest of the councils in Gloucestershire. The management of the team is highly regarded by partners.
- 161 The council demonstrates a clear commitment to delivering improvement in community safety through partnership working. The police are effectively engaged and there are examples of pooling resources, for example a police officer is located at the council offices. There are also examples of partnership working on CCTV, radio link for licensed premises and a late night bus. Good links also exist with the fire service.
- 162 The council has been successful at identifying and securing external funding to take initiatives forward. It has worked with others to pool budgets and deliver services on a county-wide or inter-district basis when this is more appropriate. Examples are the support for a dedicated crime analyst, the ASTRA project to discourage under 18 year-olds from running away, a domestic violence project, and setting up the Racial Incident Group.
- 163 The council has introduced a wide range of initiatives that are improving community safety and addressing people's fear of crime. Examples include the 'Message in a Bottle' scheme, EPIC (emergency personal information cards), 'Safe Child', a domestic violence linkline, a women's safety booklet and many more. Street drinking has been banned in Stroud and is seen as a resounding success. A youth shelter has been provided in Thrupp and more are planned. The council has helped to fund an extensive CCTV system that includes three mobile cameras that the council is responsible for deploying in consultation with the police. The council is also tackling fear of crime by installing CCTV in all of its sheltered housing schemes, where monitoring is carried out by the residents.
- 164 The level of overall crime in Stroud is below the national average but four out of six crime categories showed a rise between 2001/02 and 2002/03. Domestic burglaries fell by 16 per cent and robberies stayed the same. However, theft of motor vehicles rose by 19 per cent, theft from motor vehicles rose by 8 per cent, violent crime by 68 per cent and sexual offences by 100 per cent.
- 165 Fear of crime is rising and is an area of concern especially among older people. The council's 'perceptions of crime' survey revealed an increase between 2001 and 2003 from 28 per cent to 33 per cent in the percentage of people who felt that their lives were restricted by crime.
- 166 The council has taken less community safety action in regard to its car parks. None of the public car parks has 'safe by design' awards and none has CCTV installed. The council considers that although car crime is increasing it is mainly on-street where the problems are occurring. However, many of the car parks have signs giving warnings of crime that may be adding to people's fears.

- 167 The council, through the CDP, has an effective reporting structure to manage performance. The CDP's action plan is monitored and an annual report is published covering achievements. However, there is an emphasis on input actions rather than measurable outcomes as the council is not always able to measure the outcomes from its work on community safety. Targets are still being developed for the neighbourhood wardens and there are issues surrounding changes to national crime recording and the fact that statistics can be skewed by one-off factors such as drug offences arising from the Glastonbury festival.

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

- 168 Low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.
- 169 Young people are not identified as one of the key priorities of the council and public opinion surveys have not identified this as a major issue. As a result, the council has not developed a youth strategy and has not carried out a formal assessment of young people's needs. However, young people are one of the eight priorities of the CDP, both as victims and perpetrators of crime and strong links exist between community safety and activities for young people. The council has led a number of initiatives for the CDP that have targeted young people. Its approach to younger people is identified as best practice in the county, for example, outreach work to schools, campaign on internet safety and mentoring for young people in partnership with the county youth service. Partners see the council's approach to substance misuse, diversity and social inclusion as good.
- 170 A wide range of outdoor and indoor leisure and recreation facilities are provided by the council across the district. These facilities are available for young people to use but are not exclusively for their use. Stratford Park in Stroud provides a major facility that has recently been refurbished at a cost of £1 million. A number of more basic facilities are provided in the smaller towns. The council has been successful in developing joint use of school facilities. The council has agreed joint use of education facilities for leisure pursuits and activities for young people in six locations. The Museum in the Park and the Subscription Rooms provide education programmes, activities and workshops. Skateboard and BMX facilities are provided in Stroud, Cam and Nailsworth and a further £100,000 has been allocated in the next four years for additional sites. Work is underway on a £10 million cinema complex on the redeveloped bus station site in Stroud. The council promoted this as a regeneration project following public consultation which identified a cinema as the most desired facility. This will provide a long-awaited six screen cinema and 16 lane bowling centre that is likely to be well used by young people.
- 171 The council has excellent partnerships with the county council youth service and other agencies that have achieved a lot in meeting the needs of young people. Examples include a range of holiday activities across the district such as Kapers, youth arts projects such as training for CD production and mixing skills and the peer education project which focuses on issues around drugs. The council has supported partnership working by helping to fund a trainee youth worker in Nailsworth and outreach work in five locations across the district.

- 172 The council looks after the safety of young people. Work with young people is covered by a comprehensive corporate child protection policy with service-specific additions. The policy was agreed after consultation with a number of agencies such as the NSPCC, Sport England, neighbouring councils and social services. Training is given to managers and this is annually refreshed.
- 173 The council has a number of well-developed mechanisms to help it to effectively engage with young people, such as the Stroud District Youth Council and the Stroud Rural Peer Education Project. The Stroud District Youth Council was established by the council in 2000. It gives a democratic voice to 10,000 young people between the ages of 11 and 18. It has its own budget, the youth initiatives fund, for making grant awards to young people's projects. Past grants have been for projects varying from theatre to skiing, basketball to video making and from driving to music making. They have helped to create new youth groups and improved the social potential of existing groups, as well as improving access to information. A representative of the youth council attends the LSP. The Stroud Rural Peer Education Project is a young people's consultation forum, which engages with young people throughout the area, feeding back to the district council. The council also receives good intelligence on young people's needs by the close relations it has with town and parish councils.
- 174 However, the council's approach to consulting young people has historically been ad-hoc, often based on individual projects such as skateboard parks rather than overall needs. The lack of a specific focus on young people as a priority means that the council has limited data on young people to guide its decisions. For example, while overall attendances at leisure facilities are recorded the council does not know what proportion are young people. The lack of detailed information also means that the council cannot be sure if there are any hard to reach groups that need special attention. To address these issues the council is working with the youth council in 2004 with the aim to have an action plan for services to young people in place by March 2005, as part of wider community cohesion/well-being work.
- 175 While the council makes efforts to promote activities for young people, there is room for improvement. The council's website provides links to a separate website for the youth council and to the county council's youth service website. Other information for young people is found on 'Life Events' pages. However, these sites are not obvious for people to access and are not used in a promotional way.

### 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?	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EMAS accreditation</li> <li>• Green Spaces Strategy and partnership</li> <li>• Health checks for town and parish plans</li> <li>• Examples of environmental improvement eg the forecourt to the Subscription Rooms</li> <li>• DDA compliance of buildings</li> <li>• Air quality assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No adopted local plan</li> <li>• Limited SPG</li> <li>• Use of s106</li> <li>• Poor performance in processing planning applications</li> </ul>
Does the council help keep the locality clean?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gloucestershire Waste Partnership</li> <li>• Best quartile for recycling and volume of waste collected</li> <li>• High satisfaction with recycling facilities</li> <li>• 100 per cent kerbside recycling service</li> <li>• 'Good' rating of environmental services by Audit Commission</li> <li>• £500k programme for public convenience improvements</li> <li>• Improved satisfaction with cleanliness</li> <li>• Action to deal with dog fouling and abandoned vehicles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed national recycling targets</li> <li>• No plans to achieve national targets</li> <li>• Limited enforcement action</li> <li>• Limited use of service standards</li> <li>• Performance monitoring against service targets eg fly-tipping</li> </ul>
Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?	a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community safety a corporate priority</li> <li>• Strong partnership working</li> <li>• Community safety well resourced</li> <li>• Beacon Council Status</li> <li>• Neighbourhood warden scheme</li> <li>• Wide range of initiatives/ improvements eg Message in a Bottle, CCTV</li> <li>• Integration of community safety into all council services</li> <li>• Effective actions to deal with anti social behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rising crime figures in more categories than are falling</li> <li>• Fear of crime increasing</li> <li>• No 'secure by design' awards or CCTV in car parks</li> <li>• Monitoring of inputs of initiatives rather than outcomes</li> </ul>
Does the council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range of initiatives and activities eg KAPERS</li> <li>• Range of facilities eg skateboard parks, youth shelter, joint use with schools</li> <li>• Good partnership working</li> <li>• Good intelligence on local needs</li> <li>• Youth Council/cabinet</li> <li>• Corporate child protection policy</li> <li>• Strong links to community safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal needs assessment</li> <li>• Promotion of activities</li> <li>• No strategy for young people</li> </ul>
<b>Public space diagnostic assessment judgement</b>		<b>B</b>	

#### Scoring key

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

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

## Appendix 3 - Appointed auditor assessment

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

Area for auditor judgement	Grade	Issues included in this area
Financial standing	3	Setting a balanced budget Setting a capital programme Financial monitoring and reporting Meeting financial targets Financial reserves
Systems of internal financial control	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	3	Ethical framework Governance arrangements Treasury management Prevention and detection of fraud and corruption
Financial statements	4	Timeliness Quality Supporting records
Legality of significant financial transactions	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

177 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

178 Overall, we found that Stroud District Council's housing benefit (HB) and council tax benefit (CTB) service is providing a *Fair* performance. Stroud District Council's current performance demonstrates a number of strengths. These include:

- ◆ a vision to provide an effective and secure benefits service that has been approved by members;
- ◆ policies and objectives for its benefits service drawn directly from the vision statement, with objectives for continuous improvement in its service delivery;
- ◆ a clear and accessible HB and CTB claim form that meets standard;
- ◆ a service that is Verification Framework compliant;
- ◆ a landlord guide and bulletins which are available to offer practical advice to landlords on the operation of the HB scheme;
- ◆ Internal Audit has assessed compliance against performance standards;
- ◆ a full range of sanctions is used against fraudsters; and
- ◆ a policy for the recovery of HB overpayments approved by members.

179 However, there are some areas where Stroud 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:

- ◆ accurately recording and analysing management checks to ensure that a minimum of 10 per cent are undertaken and that the results of checking feed into staff training and development plans and are reported to senior officers and members;
- ◆ providing procedural guidance covering all aspects of the service, including all the relevant regulations and circulars;
- ◆ producing a documented benefits take-up strategy;
- ◆ producing management Information to effectively monitor customer waiting times for personal and telephone callers;
- ◆ improving the speed of processing of new claims and changes of circumstances;

- ◆ monitoring claims routinely to establish if a Payment on Account is appropriate;
- ◆ sifting all fraud referrals within five days of receipt and commencing investigations within 14 days of receiving the referral; and
- ◆ making regular reports to members on the age and level of outstanding debt.

### **Proven capacity to improve**

- 180 We assessed Stroud District Council's proven capacity to improve as *Fair towards Good*. The council acknowledged that recent claims performance has been poor but they are taking positive action to improve. Stroud District Council was able to demonstrate the following positive aspects:
- ◆ willingness to invest in the service to improve systems and increase staffing levels;
  - ◆ a detailed service plan with specific objectives linked to corporate priorities; and
  - ◆ flexible staff working to assist the recruitment and retention of staff.
- 181 However, the following areas led us to question the extent to which Stroud District Council was able to prove its capacity to improve:
- ◆ failure to meet targets including processing new claims, changes of circumstances and sanctions;
  - ◆ failure to record and monitor management checks to gauge the quality of work and establish training and procedural needs; and
  - ◆ the need for better management information in some areas to monitor and manage performance.
- 182 We would like to thank Stroud District Council staff, particularly the benefits manager, for their assistance and co-operation with the assessment process.
- 183 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

- 184 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.
- 185 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.
- 186 The assessment for Stroud District Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 12-16 July 2004.
- 187 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.