



**Bromsgrove**  
District Council

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# **CPA Self Assessment**

## **Bromsgrove District Council**

### **September 2008**



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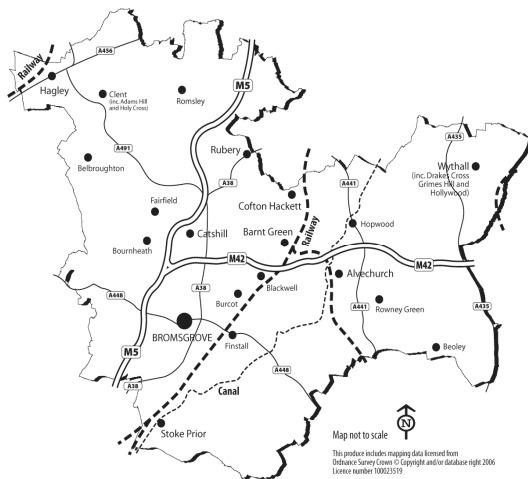
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# 1. Local Authority Context and Summary

## Geography and Communities

Bromsgrove District is in north Worcestershire, covering a large district area of approximately 83.9 square miles. Whilst only 14 miles from the centre of Birmingham, the Lickey Hills country park provides an important dividing line between the urban West Midlands Conurbation and the rural landscape of north Worcestershire. Ninety percent of the District is greenbelt which causes problems for housing policy, with regional growth being focused on Worcester City and Birmingham, with the District being the green belt break between the two. Four radial routes pass through the District, each served by railway lines and major roads, including the M5 running north and south, the M42 running east and west, with further links to the M40 and M6.

**Table 1 – Map of Bromsgrove District**



Data suggests that 16,643 people travel into the District for work, with 26,112 (29%) of the population travelling out, a net commute out of 9,469. Our main communities are detailed in Table 1. The District has no wards in the top 20% most deprived in England; however, the Council's recent Labour Market survey highlighted a significant variation in incomes between people who live and work in the District and those who commute out to work.

## Population

The population of the District is 91,600 and the Office for National Statistics predicts that this will increase by 15.3% over the next 30 years to 105,615 in 2029. The Regional Spatial Strategy Two (RSS2) has identified only 2,000 homes for the District over the next 25 years, with the possibility that the District may have to take some of Redditch Borough Council's housing allocation. The Council is currently challenging the District's RSS2 allocation, as the need for affordable housing far exceeds this allocation. The Council is working with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust on a full housing market survey to help us challenge the allocation.

The black and minority ethnic population (BME) is only 3.3%, which is low for the region and nationally. This BME % comprises 1% Irish, 0.8% Asian, 0.8% mixed, 0.4% black and 0.3% Chinese. There are 37,798 households in the District. Over

25% of households contain only one older person. An estimated 6,964 households in the District have one or more members in an identified special needs group. This is 19.1% of all households in the District, well above the national average; of these 56.7% have a physical disability and 37% are frail elderly. The elderly population is predicted to expand as a proportion of the overall District population, with the over 80s population estimated to increase by 123.3% by 2029.

## **Economy**

The economic picture of the District has generally been very positive. The mean household income is £36,906, which is the highest in the County (the County average is £34,737). There are three major areas of economic regeneration within the District: the Longbridge site, Bromsgrove town centre and Bromsgrove railway station. In April 2005, parts of Phoenix Venture Holdings (PVH), most significantly MG Rover and PowerTrain entered administration, resulting in the closure of the Longbridge car plant. These parts of the Group employed around 5,850 people in the West Midlands and an estimated £410m was spent with firms based in the West Midlands as part of the supply chain. Whilst unemployment levels naturally increased with the closure, the District's unemployment levels have returned to very low levels (1.5%). Bromsgrove town centre needs a major overhaul to encourage local shopping and to be able to compete with neighbouring shopping centres. Bromsgrove station is the third area of concern. The current station facilities are not considered fit for purpose and a feasibility study is currently being carried out on the possible redesign of the station so that it can take bigger trains and more passengers and an increase of at least 300 additional car parking spaces. This would help "future proof" the station against any changes to transport charges that may affect Birmingham city centre. The current "credit crunch" and poor economic outlook may impact on these regeneration initiatives, particularly, the town centre.

## **Sustainable Development**

A healthy natural environment is vital to our existence. The past twenty years have seen a growing realisation that the current model of development is unsustainable. We already have a number of initiatives in place to help improve our sustainability. The Council House is in the process of switching to 100% green electricity and part of our power comes from solar panels on our roof. We use 100% recycled paper and encourage recycling in house and in the wider District. We are signed up to the Worcestershire car sharing scheme. The Local Strategic Partnership's Better Environment Group has a number of projects underway aiming to reduce our carbon footprint, help conserve and enhance our biodiversity, and reduce pollution. The new Local Area Agreement (LAA) has a number of challenging environment targets which the Council is responding to.

## **Affordable Housing**

One of the biggest issues facing the District is affordable housing: 83.4% of households are owner occupied, the 11<sup>th</sup> highest figure in England and Wales and historically house prices have risen faster than the national average. The Council is currently operating a planning moratorium with only affordable housing developments being built. The Housing Strategy has a target of 80 units of affordable housing a year for the next four years.

## **Education, Deprivation and Health**

The percentage of the population qualified to NVQ Level 4 is significantly higher than average. GCSE results gained at local authority schools and colleges in Worcestershire in 2006 were amongst the highest in the country (56.3% achieved five or more GCSEs at A\*-C). The District ranks 299th out of 354 councils on the national index of multiple deprivation 2007 (where one is the most deprived), making the District one of the least deprived nationally. Only 4,456 households are in receipt of housing or council tax benefits in the District, one of the lowest figures in Worcestershire. As a result, identifying the vulnerable within our communities is more difficult than a district with geographic areas of deprivation.

Generally, the District's population is healthier than the regional average. Young people (18-24) have a high risk status being the most likely to smoke, binge drink and not take exercise. Potentially, we could be storing up problems in our young people. The most recent Primary Care Trust (PCT) annual report noted that our children's health is good, but there is a need for more child and adolescent mental health services. The rate of teenage pregnancies in Bromsgrove in 2004 was 22.4 conceptions per 1,000 females, which is almost half that of the England average. The rate has also decreased in Bromsgrove from 26.7 in 1997.

## **Crime and Fear of Crime**

There has been a 31.9% reduction in headline comparator crime figures for the District over the last three years. This, together with the Partners and Communities Together meetings, has had a very positive impact on fear of crime in the District: 98% of residents feel safe in their neighbourhood during daytime and 73% after dark. Low level issues like anti-social behaviour, litter, rubbish, "young people hanging around", vandalism and criminal damage remain an issue. Drug offences are low.

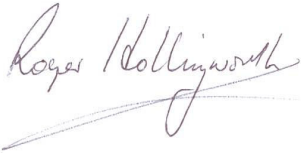
## **Regulatory, Political, Managerial and Financial Context**

The Council has a majority Conservative administration, with twenty-seven Conservatives, six Labour, four Independents, and two Wythall Residents' Association. The Council operates a modernised political structure with the Leader/Cabinet model, supported by three non-Executive Boards: the Audit Board, Scrutiny Steering Board and Performance Management Board. There is also a Planning Committee, Standards Committee and Licensing Committee. The Council operates a Corporate Management Team (CMT) and has an Acting Joint Chief Executive of Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council, Kevin Dicks. This joint role started on 01 August 2008 and will be subject to a review at 6 months. The aim of the joint post, is to facilitate a strategic business model of joint working between the two councils, with the aim of delivering better value for money to our residents.

The Council has a net budget of £11.733m (2008/09) and a Government Grant of £4.858m. The Council employs 358 staff. The 2008/2009 budget round involved the deletion of 35 posts, increased charges and a museum closure, as the Council re-aligned its spending to its priorities, something it was praised for in the recent housing inspection.

## **CPA Self Assessment and Performance**

The Council was judged to be Poor in the Corporate Assessment undertaken in early 2007. We self assessed ourselves as poor for that assessment and requested the assessment to help provide us with a benchmark and route map for improvement over the next 12 months. We have now requested a second assessment, as our rate of progress has been significant, as identified in both the recent Direction of Travel and Housing Inspection and as evidenced by the continued and sustained improvement in performance generally over the last two years. We have self assessed ourselves as Good. Our Vision remains to deliver community leadership and excellent services to our residents.



**Roger Hollingworth**  
Leader of the Council



**Kevin Dicks**  
Acting Joint Chief Executive

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

## 2. Ambitions for the Community

- 2.1 The Council's Vision is: "Working together to build a District where people are proud to live and work, through community leadership and excellent services". The Vision and the Values that underpin it: Leadership, Partnership, Equality and Customer First, have been developed through our change programme "Building Pride". The programme recognises that the Council needs to re-build a sense of pride in living in the District and working for the Council through the delivery of long term outcomes and excellent services.
- 2.2 The Council's objectives and priorities are:-
- (1) **Council Objective One: Regeneration** with A Thriving Market Town and Housing as its priorities.
  - (2) **Council Objective Two: Improvement**, with Customer Service as a priority.
  - (3) **Council Objective Three: Sense of Community and Well Being**, with Sense of Community being a priority.
  - (4) **Council Objective Four: Environment**, with Clean Streets and Recycling being a priority.
- 2.3 The Council developed its Vision, Values, Objectives and Priorities through consultation and regularly communicates these to residents. The Council has used a number of focus groups<sup>1</sup> and three high quality customer panels to help find out about residents' views and satisfaction. This consultation is supported by a range of other mechanisms like the Disabled Users Group (DUG), Equalities and Diversity Forum, 68 PACT residents' meetings a year (attended by the ward councillor and a member of Corporate Management Team), Parish Forums and two pilot Local Neighbourhood Partnerships.
- 2.4 The Council's ambitions for its communities are now fully developed through a comprehensive Sustainable Community Strategy, with SMART high level action plans supporting each Theme. The Strategy was based on a detailed quantitative analysis of the District, undertaken by Mott McDonald, with the targets cross referenced to the County Local Area Agreement. The Strategy was launched in November 2007. The Council's annual business cycle includes an annual update of the Sustainable Community Strategy, so it is currently being updated to reflect our quality of life survey and the new Local Area Agreement targets.
- 2.5 Key strategies flow from the Community Strategy, in particular, the Council Plan and service business plans. The Acting Joint Chief Executive is the current representative for the northern districts on the County LSP Management Group and lead for affordable housing on the Chief Executive's Panel. The Assistant Chief Executive also chairs the County Heads of Policy and Performance Group.
- 2.6 Through the I&DeA Top Team Development Programme, there is now a sense of shared purpose between Cabinet and CMT and ambition for our communities. The Leader of the Council has also established a Leader's Meeting (Leader and Leader of the Opposition) to improve cross party working. This shared ambition is underpinned by a Member/officer protocol<sup>7</sup>, a Member/Member protocol<sup>8</sup>, job descriptions for key Member positions<sup>9</sup>, a Management Competency Framework<sup>10</sup> (which in turn is planned to be cascaded to all staff within the Council) and a Modern Councillor training

programme. Both the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Council Plan go to Full Council for approval. Progress on the Council Plan is reported monthly to Members, with progress on the Community Strategy being reported to the LSP Board and reviewed annually by the Performance Management Board and Full Council. Scrutiny also plays an active role in supporting and developing the Council's ambitions. Recent scrutiny task and finish groups have included transport, air quality and waste. Further ones on community safety and older people are planned.

- 2.7 Getting residents to understand the difficult trade offs that politicians need to make remains an area of concern for the Council, as it does nationally. The Council has developed a community bidding approach for the Equalities and Diversity Forum, has delegated £15,000 to each Local Neighbourhood Partnership (LNPs), is running a budget jury and will be running its first Children and Young People's participatory budgeting event in April 2009
- 2.8 The Council is working all the time to improve its intelligence led approach to developing its and its partner's ambitions. The Council has commissioned a ward level analysis for the Community Strategy and more recently has commissioned a Labour Market Survey. The Customer Panel provides a four way split (urban 1 and 2, rural 1 and 2) and this is further supplemented by ward level analysis by the County Council. As part of our developing approach to ICT integration between the front and back office, the Council has cleansed its current data and implemented a corporate gazetteer that will underpin 11 new ICT systems which will support the work of departments.
- 2.9 Through these mechanisms, the Council has a strongly developed understanding of its communities and the scale of the challenge faces. The basic problem that the Council faces is one of affluence e.g. expensive housing, a town centre that does not reflect the wealth of the District and small pockets of relative deprivation. The Council also understands the diversity issues it faces. The Council has worked hard to develop an All Inclusive Equalities Scheme, supported by the Disabled Users Group and Equality and Diversity Forum. These provide Members and senior officers with face to face examples of the issues residents face. The two groups have been involved in the formulation of the Council's priorities and customer standards. Key issues to emerge are the regeneration of the town centre with suitable disabled access, extended hours of the shop mobility service (already actioned), the need for a community transport scheme (a bid will be made during the 2009/2010 budget process) and the redevelopment of the train station, which is currently not DDA compliant.
- 2.10 The Council understands the value the voluntary sector can add to its ambitions. The Council has established a service level agreement (SLA) and funding for the Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN), the local voluntary sector infrastructure organisation. BARN sits on the LSP Board and chairs the Older Persons Theme Group. The Council has a COMPACT with the voluntary sector, is currently working with the sector on the community transport project and was recently actively involved in national volunteer week, with over 20 staff, including senior officers working with the voluntary sector for the day.
- 2.11 The Council understands the value of communicating its ambitions. Our Communications Strategy's<sup>18</sup> first priority is the demonstration of visible leadership. Senior Members and managers have adopted a range of leadership styles over the last twelve months depending on particular circumstance e.g. directive in setting the Council's objectives and priorities, working in partnership through the LSP, cross party working through the opposition party chairmanship of scrutiny boards, listening at PACT meetings, empowerment through the pilot Local Neighbourhood Partnerships

and understanding through a programme of “back to the floor”<sup>19</sup> days for every member of the CMT.

- 2.12 The Council has communicated its Vision, Values, Objectives and Priorities to staff through a range of mechanisms including regular staff forums; a bi-weekly Core Brief, delivered by managers and cascaded via team meetings, team action plans as part of the service business planning process<sup>5</sup>, personal development reviews (PDRs), posters for each of its values and one for the Vision and a programme of attendance by senior management at team meetings. Press releases are made available to staff and the Council’s Internet has also recently been redesigned. The Council has also introduced the principle of management conferences for the first time in Autumn 2006, to start achieving “buy in” from middle management. The recent IIP assessment commented very favourably on management/staff relations, given the difficult times the Council has had and is still going through with Single Status.
- 2.13 Finally, the Council has established a Communications Group for the LSP Board, regularly communicates its ambition for the District through Together Bromsgrove (the residents magazine), press releases and events like the “Town Hall” meeting, “Chat with the Chief”, Parish Forums etc.

### **3. Prioritisation**

- 3.1 The Council now has a strong annual business cycle in place to ensure that residents’ ambitions are translated into local improvements. Budget decisions are driven by the Council Plan, service plans and an annual improvement plan (a detailed Gantt chart). These reflect a three year and one year focus respectively and are underpinned by the 10 year focus of the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 3.2 The Council’s Objectives have been defined in broad terms<sup>3</sup> and referenced to national policy and the Worcestershire Local Area Agreement. By providing a broad definition for each Objective, the Council’s leadership were then able to select which aspects of each Objective is a priority, so for example, under Council Objective Three: A Sense of Community and Well Being, the Council has made community events, community engagement, the Every Child Matters agenda and community safety priorities, but has not made the Choosing Health agenda a priority. This does not mean that the Council does not contribute to this national objective, just that it will attract less resourcing than other aspects of the national and regional agenda, which have been aligned into the Council’s strategic framework.
- 3.3 The Council is explicit in what are not priorities. The Council has adopted a simple approach to this issue. Service areas that fall outside the delivery of the five priorities are the areas required to find the savings targets in any given year, subject to consideration of the impact any efficiencies or service cuts have on the wider workings of the Council. This approach has proved effective. The 2008/2009 budget round resulted in 35 posts being deleted, the closure of the local museum, the transfer of one of the sports facilities to a school, charging for green waste, increased car parking charges; removing concessionary parking charges for the over 60s; whilst at the same time going through Single Status with staff. These have all been difficult political decisions, but by striking a balance between competing residents’ demands, what is most important to residents and what money is available, the Council is in a much stronger position financially than it was several years ago.
- 3.4 The Council recognises the connections between its various priorities and ensures a cross cutting approach. The planned redevelopment of the town centre, includes not just developing a thriving market town (corporate priority 1), but also affordable

housing in the town centre and potentially on the existing Council House site (corporate priority 2), improved customer access, through community transport and highways improvements, in particular, appropriately placed drop kerbs (corporate priority 3) and designing out crime, ensuring a full programme of community events and encouraging an evening economy (corporate priority 4). A similar approach has been adopted for Longbridge and the proposed new train station.

- 3.5 Members, officers and staff understand these priorities. XX % of staff said they understood the Council's priorities in last year's Employee Survey. The Council regularly updates staff on the priorities, at staff forums and through Core Brief. Posters are displayed around the building and staff were consulted at the inception of the 2009/2010 budget process through staff forums. This information was then presented by representatives of the Manager's Forum, to Cabinet and CMT at their July away day. Two focus groups were also held with staff on the 2008/2009 improvement plan.
- 3.6 The recent housing inspection identified a strong alignment between the Council's priorities and MTFP. Service business planning starts each July once the outline priorities and budget parameters are set at the Cabinet/CMT away day (these are then approved by Full Council in September each year). Heads of Service then produce their first draft service business plans with budget bids and identified savings for consideration by Leader's Group in early October. This ensures a strong linkage between strategic direction and spending plans. Bids are scored on their relevance to the priorities, community impact and value for money.
- 3.7 In developing this strategic agenda, the Council has made extensive use of learning from other organisations in the development of its priorities. The development of the Improvement Plan was assisted by Walsall MBC (changes to the Planning Service and the Council's Team of the Month Scheme also originated from Walsall MBC). Improvements to the performance management regime have been adopted from the experiences of Rotherham and Derby City councils. The Council has recently undertaken an emergency planning exercise with the support of other councils; has taken on board learning from other councils that have used Performance Plus (the Council's performance management software), learning from Kerrier District Council about CPA and researched Warwickshire County Council's and Bracknell Forest's approaches to town centre redevelopment. The Council has visited Northamptonshire County Council to learn about its approach to diversity, Wychavon District Council to find out about their sports trust, Watford Borough Council to find out about their change management programme and Kettering District Council to learn about their planning function. The Council has worked with GOWM and BDHT on trying to develop innovative approaches to affordable housing. The Council has received support from Solihull MBC on both performance management and communications. Through the delivery of the Improvement Plan, the Council can clearly point to how this learning has and is being used, but would accept that the sharing of this learning across the Council could be improved.

#### **4. Capacity**

- 4.1 Member/officer relations have been a key issue for the Council. These relations have significantly improved over the last few years. Cabinet and CMT have worked together on two Top Team programmes, the introduction of new political structures has enabled non-executive Members to examine and scrutinise performance and policy through the Performance Management Board and Scrutiny Task Groups. Members and officers also work together at PACT meetings.

- 4.2 The introduction of Member/officer protocols, a new Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team, Member training and a clear steer from the Leader about enabling managers to manage has created the right environment for Portfolio Holders to provide strategic direction and oversee progress, supported by the Performance Management Board (and attended by Portfolio Holders) and managers to manage operational detail. Senior managers are also able to contribute to the strategic debate through the Top Team programme and Members are able to drill down into operational areas, when appropriate.
- 4.3 Relationships between corporate management and departments are good. Heads of Service attend the weekly corporate management team which helps build a one council culture. On occasions when there have been differences of opinion between departments, these are identified, escalated and the relevant Executive Director or Acting Joint Chief Executive involved to ensure a way forward is agreed.
- 4.4 The Top Team programme has created an atmosphere of respect between senior Members and officers that enables a full and frank debate about the Council's strategic direction. This programme has included developing the Council's priorities together and more recently assessing our combined performance against the I&DeA's Effective Top Team model and developing actions to improve further. A culture of openness between managers and staff exists and has been positively developed through a range of mechanisms (ConnectWithKev, "Back to the Floor", attendance at team meetings by senior managers etc.). This was commented on favourably by the recent IIP assessment.
- 4.5 The Council recognises its duty to demonstrate openness and transparency in its decision making processes. The Council operates a Standards Committee with an independent chair, supported by the Monitoring Officer. To support this committee, the Council has invested in a new officer post to ensure each complaint is given a detailed consideration. The Council has also commissioned an independent ethical governance review and have implemented the recommendations of this review. All Members receive training, as part of their induction, on the ethical standards and procedures they must follow and existing Members have also been trained. The Council has also made changes to its Constitution<sup>17</sup> and Scheme of Delegation<sup>18</sup> to reflect a more modernised approach and is developing a robust process to ensure that the Constitution remains a live and relevant document that mirrors the way the Council conducts its affairs. Decision making is timely and supports the achievements of priorities. The Council operates a rolling Forward Plan<sup>8</sup> of all decisions to be sought from the Cabinet over a four month period.
- 4.6 The Council has employed an experienced Member from another council as a facilitator for working with and developing the scrutiny function. The scrutiny task groups have produced a number of excellent reports, including ones on transport, air quality and waste management. These reports are discussed at Cabinet and a significant number of the recommendations have been agreed. The Scrutiny Steering Board (SSB) monitors progress on these recommendations through its scrutiny tracker.
- 4.7 Risk management now forms a key part of the Council's strategic planning framework. The Council operates a corporate risk register, updated quarterly and reported to the Corporate Risk Management Steering Group and Audit Board. Each service business plan is supported by a service risk register, cross referenced to the service's key deliverables.

- 4.8 The Council is self aware about its capacity. The Council requested a CPA in 2007, expecting our rating would be Poor, in order to test our plans for improvement. The Council was considered self aware by this assessment. The 2007 CPA identified the need for additional senior management capacity. As a result, a new Executive Director Services post was created. Prior to this, the Council appointed a new permanent chief executive and has previously undertaken a Council wide restructure to build capacity within the organisation. The Council has drawn down £300,000 from reserves to pump prime improvement and has made extensive use of funding opportunities from the Capacity Building Fund, Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) and Intervention Fund. The Council has appointed a Procurement Officer and procurement practices and savings have improved as a result. The Council recognises that the appointment of its Chief Executive, to be Acting Joint Chief Executive of Bromsgrove and Redditch councils is a risk, but it is designed to increase the capacity of both organisations by developing a strategic approach to value for money. An independent feasibility study was conducted prior to the appointment and the Council operates a risk register for this project and the Acting Joint Chief Executive has specific terms to ensure a focus on the issues that can add most value to both councils, whilst retaining a focus on Bromsgrove through its CPA.
- 4.9 The Council's current VFM profile is mixed<sup>3</sup>. The Council has a VFM Strategy<sup>4</sup> including an approach to scoring each service's VFM and developing agreed actions through the service business planning process<sup>5</sup>. The Council deleted 35 posts, mostly in support services through the 2008/2009 budget cycle, is achieving an £80,000 per annum procurement savings target, has increased its income from sponsorship and charging, transferred its payroll function to Redditch BC and established SLAs with a range of partners e.g. the Artrix, BARN, BDHT etc. Most recently, the Council has developed a strategic approach to value for money through the business model of a joint chief executive for Bromsgrove and Redditch BC. Having visited councils with high scores for value for money, Bromsgrove has stronger processes in place to achieve value for money and now needs time to let these take effect.
- 4.10 The Council has a detailed and fully costed three year MTFP. The MTFP includes clear allocations for priorities requiring significant capital investment like the town centre and affordable housing. The Council has also recently identified the need for future capital allocations to modernise the collection methods at the depot and these will be built into the next update. The Council has appropriate working balances that have been enhanced by a strong performance in treasury management and £20m reserves.
- 4.11 The Council has invested significantly in organisational development, including an Organisational Development Manager and a corporate staff training budget of £200,000, a middle managers training programme, Top Team programme and Member Development programme. The rate of improvement by the Council suggests this is paying dividends.
- 4.12 HR strategies and practices effectively support corporate priorities. The Council has a People Strategy<sup>9</sup>. Through the Strategy, the Council has also introduced a significant range of human resource techniques to improve capacity within its workforce. These include Personal Development Reviews for all staff (a corporately monitored target by Members), a skills audit, a new capability procedure<sup>13</sup>, new Sickness Absence Policy<sup>14</sup>, new disciplinary procedure and anti-bullying and harassment procedures. Through its performance monitoring the Council monitors sickness absence, staff turnover, early retirements and a range of indicators to ensure its workforce is representative of the community<sup>15</sup>. The Council is currently undergoing Single Status; as a result the Council has re-programmed the approach to workforce planning to

2009/10. 100% of staff have received a PDR and sickness absence is now falling and below target.

- 4.13 The Council makes extensive use of ICT. During 2006/07 the Council started three ICT projects. The Internet project which has led to the overhaul and modernisation of the Council's website, the infrastructure project (£1.8m) and the Spatial project (£5.0m). The Spatial project, supported by the new infrastructure will significantly reduce process times and lead to customer information being single sourced avoiding duplication and error. As part of this work, the Council's data has been cleansed, the corporate gazetteer has now been launched and the Council is now in the process of implementing 11 software solutions, primarily in the Planning and Environment Department, that will eventually link into the Council's Customer Service Centre.
- 4.14 The Council has a clear project management methodology that has recently been the subject to an internal audit (a recommendation of the Performance Management Board) and updated. The Council operates a Programme Board, chaired by the Acting Joint Chief Executive, which supplements the work of Corporate Management Team and provides a setting for a more detailed consideration of the various project documents required. RIEP have identified that the Council has a large improvement agenda for its size and to our credit; we have delivered xx% and xx% of the last two year's Improvement Plan. The Council has also introduced a Capital Strategy Working Group to ensure capital spending is on track.
- 4.15 The Council is prepared to use long term partnerships and joint working with other local authorities and organisations to deliver service improvement. The Council successfully transferred its housing stock to Bromsgrove District Housing Trust in 2004. Relations with the Trust are now good with the BDHT Chief Executive sitting on the LSP Board and Chairing the Housing Theme. BDHT is the preferred RSL for the Council and we have a joint priority of affordable housing. In 2005, the Council opened its Customer Service Centre (the Hub) in partnership with the County Council. The Council has a track record of working with the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) to improve services to the homeless and through the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group (and in partnership with BDHT and Supporting People) and has developed a new Floating Support and Preventative Service for clients over 25 (younger people are catered for through the Baseline Service). The Council provides £120,000 per annum to the Artrix, with a SLA that links back to the findings from the Council's Customer Panel. The Council has a Compact with the voluntary sector and an SLA with BARN. Most recently has entered into a partnership with Redditch BC, through the appointment of the Acting Joint Chief Executive of the two councils.
- 4.16 Partners are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The LSP Board has agreed a governance framework, including a performance management framework. The roles and responsibilities of LSP members are defined in the governance framework. LSP Board members, in particular Theme Group Chairs, are supported in their work by a Senior Corporate Policy and Performance officer of the Council and performance information is regularly reported to the Board.

## **5. Performance Management**

- 5.1 The Council operates a clear golden thread, annual business cycle and a strategy to improve performance management. As a result, the Council delivered 77% of its targets for 2007/2008 which bears comparison with an excellent Council. The Council operates a very detailed corporate Improvement Plan, xx% of which was also delivered.

- 5.2 The Council sets realistic, but challenging targets for improving its performance. Challenge is provided through the Performance Management Board, monthly meetings between the portfolio holder and head of service and through a “star chamber” by senior officers of each service business plan, in addition to the routine monitoring at Corporate Management Team each month. The Council has significantly reduced the number of indicators reported (to provide focus) and improved the format of all the performance management documentation.
- 5.3 The Council has used the learning from these improvements to help develop performance management for its key strategic partnerships through the development of a performance management framework for the LSP. This includes: high level action plans (cross referenced to the County LAA) for each theme in the Sustainable Community Strategy, a community improvement plan which expands on the detail of these actions, regular reporting of key performance indicators, challenge at the LSP Board and use of performance clinics, for example on affordable housing. More detailed arrangements for monitoring each partnership sit underneath these, which have been previously referred to e.g. SLAs etc.
- 5.4 The Performance Management Board has an annual work programme of performance reports, including the corporate Improvement Plan Exception Report each month, performance indicators each month and an integrated financial/performance report each quarter. It also receives a range of other reports, for example: the Council Plan, Annual Report and detailed performance reports on our various partners etc. Portfolio Holders and the relevant heads of service are called to each meeting, to answer questions and recommendations are made to Cabinet. Portfolio Holders also receive the same information as PMB at Leader’s Group (informal Cabinet) and each Portfolio Holder receives an integrated monthly report from their head of service and meets monthly to discuss this.
- 5.5 Performance management is fully integrated with the management of resources through the development of the medium term financial plan. The identified priorities of the Council reflect performance management issues e.g. affordable housing, a clean district, customer service etc.
- 5.6 The Council launched its Customer Feedback System in January 2008. The system is available to all staff to take complaints or compliments from our customers. The system is monitored daily by the Customer First officer, complaint figures supplied monthly to CMT, Cabinet and the Performance Management Board and a more detailed report, analysing trends produced quarterly. Through the 68 annual PACT meetings there is also an established process for residents to vote on their top three concerns for a particular area, that are then dealt with by the Police or senior Council officer attached to that PACT. There is a clear and publicised grievance procedure for staff, but also opportunities for staff through “ConnectWithKev” and staff forums to feedback concerns to senior management. These were particularly useful during Single Status and the IIP assessor commented very favourably on the state of senior manager/staff relations given the Council’s context.
- 5.7 Customer focus is understood and is a central driver. Customer First is one of our four values.. The Hub receives over 7,000 calls per month, with a 90% plus resolution at first point of contact<sup>9</sup>. On average, the customer has to wait 35 seconds. All staff have received Customer First Training, both in 2007 and 2008. The Council has published customer standards, which are currently being subject to review through customer research and has recently updated the Customer First Strategy to include a stronger focus on customer access, having benchmarked with Shropshire County Council (excellent and improving). The Acting Joint Chief Executive meets regularly with the

County Council to resolve customer issues. A detailed report is produced each month on the Hub's performance which is reported to the CMT, while the Centre itself has installed a large screen to display real time queue data (including comparative data from other districts) and undertaken mystery shopping exercises, which have been similarly conducted across the whole Council. The Council also operates a Customer Panel and is now tracking customer satisfaction every year.

- 5.8 Because of the Council's "Poor" CPA rating the Council is already subject to a high level of external challenge through inspection, audit and the Government Monitoring Board. The Council can demonstrate a track record of responding to challenges from these mechanisms, including a revised and much more outward focused Improvement Plan, a complete overhaul of the way in which the Council reports its performance indicators, pump priming the Improvement Plan through the use of reserves, a robust strategic housing action plan<sup>10</sup> in response to the nil star inspection and subsequent delivery of a one star with promising prospects and IIP action plan and subsequent re-accreditation, achieving all 10 standards.
- 5.9 In order to encourage an embedded performance culture across the Council, Core Brief regularly reports to staff on our performance figures and the Improvement Plan<sup>11</sup>, the Acting Joint Chief Executive, writes the lead article in the staff magazine "Connect"<sup>12</sup> which updates staff on key developments, the Assistant Chief Executive writes a regular column "Performance Matters". The Council has an established Performance Champions Group, to develop the reporting of performance information, has introduced a staff suggestion scheme "Bright Ideas"<sup>13</sup>, introduced "back to the floor" sessions, organised a programme for senior managers to attend every team meeting at least once a year and developed a single A4 poster which sets out our Vision, Values, Council Objectives and Priorities. Every team produces a team action plan, with team managers meeting with the relevant Executive Director and Assistant Chief Executive to examine their plans and every member of staff receives a PDR and six month review.
- 5.10 Similarly, the Council produces an Annual Report (integrated with financial reporting), published on the Internet and reported in more detail through a wrap around in the local press. The Council also publishes information as part of the Council Tax leaflet<sup>16</sup> on our performance. The Council also reports on its performance through the new Together Bromsgrove residents' magazine. The LSP Board also produces an Annual Report on the Community Strategy and holds an annual "town hall" meeting to update residents on progress on the big issues.
- 5.11 Finally, cross departmental working is well established within the Council. CMT meets every Tuesday and includes the heads of service. LSP Theme Groups are also well established and provide a forum for departments (as well as different organisations) to co-ordinate their activities. The Council is recognised as having a particularly strong CDRP. The Council has also established a number of meetings to bring together departments and Members, for example: Town Centre Strategy Group, the Longbridge Working Party and Affordable Housing Working Group. The Council operates a range of project groups, for example: Spatial Project Steering Group and has recently established a Programme Board. The Council also sits on a number of County/District groups with a focus on performance improvement, including the Hub Partnership and Heads of Policy and Performance Improvement (currently chaired by Bromsgrove District Council).

## 6. Achievement and Improvement

### Overall Performance

- 6.1 Outturn figures for 2007/08 show that 72% of BVPI's improved during the year, building on the 59% increase the year before. In terms of quartile distribution 60% of BVPI's are now above the median (compared to 2006/07 quartile positions – the latest ones available) with only 17% in the bottom quartile, continuing the significant improvement trend. This sustained and ongoing improvement has also been achieved in the key local performance indicators, as the table below shows.

	BVPI's		Local PI's	
PI Improvement	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08
Performance improving	59%	72%	59%	76%
Performance steady	13%	10%	9%	12%
Performance declining	28%	18%	32%	12%

PIs meeting target				
	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08
Meeting or exceeding target	65%	74%	76%	78%
Missing target but within 10%	19%	16%	6%	10.5%
Missing target by more than 10%	16%	10%	18%	10.5%

BVPI Quartile spread		
Quartile	2006/07	2007/08
Top quartile	20%	31%
2 <sup>nd</sup> quartile	18%	29%
3 <sup>rd</sup> quartile	36%	23%
Bottom quartile	26%	17%

### Council Priority One – A Thriving Town Centre

- 6.2 The Council is taking a strategic approach to regenerating the town centre and is currently working through the statutory planning requirements to develop an area action plan for the town centre. We have appointed a project manager (jointly funded by County Council). Key achievements include:-
- funding of a new toilet block in the town centre, including a high dependency unit for adults and children with disabilities (£174,000); £25,000 contribution from the Council towards the funding of feasibility study for regeneration of Bromsgrove Railway Station, the funding package has been established for a new train station and now awaiting funding approval; a major retailer for market hall site is being sought; an Issues and Options paper has been sent out for consultation and consultation completed; an Area Action Plan is being produced; and investment in community transport, linked to the town centre is about to be agreed.
  - An Events programme for the town centre has been agreed and is being implemented, with some sponsorship of the programme through the development of a Marketing Strategy. The programme includes a "Showcase" sports event in the town centre in August
  - The Customer Service Centre is located in the town centre, including Saturday opening; extended opening of the Shop mobility centre (first

opened in November 2005) in response to recent feedback. The Scheme is very successful, with over 260 registered users and on average 8 to 10 vehicles being on loan at any one time.

- Improved lighting and a spruce up of building town centre multi-story car park (£6,000) after problems with teenage drivers. Achievement of Safer Parking award. Free car parking in Bromsgrove town centre, in two weekends prior to Christmas.

### **Council Priority Two – Housing**

- 6.3 The Council has moved from a nil star, uncertain prospects service to a one star, promising prospects housing service in only 18 months. The delivery of affordable housing units have significantly improved since 2004/05 (26 units), to 75 units in 2005/2006 and a planned completion of 96 units in 2007/2008, although due to unforeseeable environmental concerns on one site, 26 of these completions will now be finalised in 2008/2009. The Council effectively supports the delivery of new affordable homes by contributing its own resources. It discounts or gifts land to support development, and commits £350,000 annually to grant fund BDHT, our primary partner.
- 6.4 The Council has challenged the Regional Spatial Strategy 2 housing figures through a Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). The Council has delivered the Government's 2010 target for reducing the number of households living in temporary accommodation and have no families staying in B&B accommodation.
- 6.5 Through the Private Tenancy Scheme over 10 applicants have found suitable housing. The scheme helps financially support home seekers. The Council is second quartile in returning the level of private sector dwellings returned to occupation. There has been a significant Improvement to disabled facilities grant performance.
- 6.6 The Council and BDHT have a joint commitment to phase out the use of hostels as temporary accommodation and replace them with self contained units. Wythall Hostel has been closed<sup>16</sup> and 21 units of self contained accommodation are currently available.
- 6.7 Whilst the housing moratorium has impacted on affordable housing provision it has led to a very high proportion of new developments being on brownfield sites, 92% (2005/06)<sup>27</sup>, compared to a target of 75% (2004) and 40% by 2011. With a limited amount of brownfield sites and the pressure for affordable housing, the use of Area Development Restraints may mean some greenfield sites will need to be released in the near future.

### **Council Priority Three – Customer Service**

- 6.8 The CSC is consistently achieving its targets of 80% of answered calls and average waiting time of 35 seconds (this is considered an acceptable wait by our customers and is down from 48 seconds in March 2007). The resolution of customer contacts at the first point of contact has increased from 83% (March 2007) to 94.3% (March 2008) Phone calls go straight through to an adviser (there is no press 1 for, press 2 for) and this compares with the best in the private sector

- 6.9 We do have periods of higher call volume, particularly, during April with Council Tax. In the first year of opening, the average call waiting time in this month was 88 seconds. For April 2008 it was 34 seconds. The Council has recently invested in a queue management system for the CSC to improve the service to our walk in customers. 71% of our customers would recommend the CSC to a friend. Only 11% of residents were dissatisfied with the service received.
- 6.10 Customer culture across the whole of the Council has been a key area for improvement. All staff have attended 'Customer First' courses and an IT system to manage and analyse complaints, comments and compliments system has recently been introduced across the Council. The corporate performance indicator set now includes performance measures about complaints and their resolution. The Council has updated its website and has a new DDA compliant Members' entrance.
- 6.11 The Council is investing £5.0m in the Spatial Project, which will see the roll out of 11 software packages including a land and property gazetteer. The Council had suffered from years of underinvestment in its ICT infrastructure and software, both of which are now being addressed. These improvements will enable residents to view and submit planning applications on-line, ensure information is up to date, provide customer histories, share information between systems and link to the CSC.
- 6.12 "Chats with the Chief" sessions have been popular, with take up from Parish Councils, Rotary, resident associations etc. The Council has introduced a Council SMS alert messaging service. Only 15% of our residents found contacting the Council difficult and we have subsequently introduced a customer access strategy to address the issues raised by those 15%. 60% of residents found the resident magazine useful and only 7% found the Council Tax leaflet not useful.
- 6.13 Finally, the Council has, in partnership with SCOPE undertaken an accessibility audit of all Council buildings<sup>30</sup> and polling stations in order to ensure that its services can be accessed and that all members of the community are able to participate fully in the democratic process. Other access improvements include: the modification of the Council's waste collection services officering aid and assistance to people with specific assistance requirements; the launch of a telephone translation service; the increased provision and use of hearing induction loops at the Council House and the Hub; the provision of all literature in alternative formats on request and the inclusion of a yellow information sheet explaining the equality services available with every piece of correspondence sent out.

**Council Priority Four – Sense of Community (community events, community engagement, children and young people and crime and disorder)**

Community Events

- 6.14 The Council provides an excellent cultural offer, with an extensive range of community events designed to help maintain a sense of community. Over 17,000 people attend the events each year. Events include the bonfire night, street theatre and bandstand programme. As a result of feedback from our Customer Panel, we now take street theatre out across the whole District and while we introduced a small charge for last year's bonfire night, almost 10,000 people turned up. The bandstand programme includes not only an extensive music programme, but also youth arts, puppets in the park, clowns and magic, story telling and youth bands. The Council also has a very active civic calendar

which helps provide a sense of civic pride and raises money for local charities. The Spadesborne Suite at the Council House is also used for a range of events like tea dances, International Woman's Day, games sessions for people with learning disabilities, weddings and the Equalities and Diversity Forum. The Forum recently successfully bid for Council funding to support Black History Month, Diwali and the Padstone Day Care Centre theatre event for people with learning disabilities. The Council also actively supported the Holocaust Memorial Day with a service held in Sanders Park in January 2008, Vetrans' Day with a special bandstand programme and Democracy Week, with a range of events. Through our Together Bromsgrove magazine, we are also bringing news about the District and a special focus on a particular area in each edition.

- 6.15 The Council has underpinned this active civic calendar with the establishment of a Standards Committee and complaints procedure to ensure the proper conduct of public life in the District.
- 6.16 The Council has a lead role in the Artrix , Bromsgrove's theatre, cinema and live music venue and facilitated both its conception and delivery. The Council funded the building of the Artrix arts centre and currently underwrites the revenue of the Artrix to the value of £120,000 per annum, supported by an SLA. The Centre provides a wide range of entertainment and an excellent facility for New College (used 14 hours a week). The facility opened in April 2005 and in 2006/2007 for example, provided: 389 performances and screenings, 12 exhibitions and over 350 creative workshop sessions. Over 26,000 people attended the Artrix in 2006/07.
- 6.17 Finally, the Council recently supported National Volunteer Week, with up to 20 staff, including the Acting Joint Chief Executive and Executive Director Partnerships and Projects going "back to the floor" with local charities to experience the significant contribution the voluntary sector makes to the District.

### Feeling Safe

- 6.18 The Council operates a highly successful Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership with the Police. The last three years has seen a 32.3% reduction in crime levels across the District (target was 17.5%) and a 47% reduction in car crime. There were only three violent incidents in the town centre over the Christmas period due to high visibility policing, better licensing and improvements to taxi pick up points. The Council's Quality of Life Survey found that only 5% of residents said that crime and anti social behaviour affects their lives a great deal. Only 7% of residents disagreed that their local area is somewhere where people from different backgrounds do not get on well. The Council has made a substantial investment in CCTV in the town centre and around the District with another £450,000 worth of programmed upgrades due over the next three years. The CCTV is clearly effective; in 3 years and 6,000,000 car parking tickets, there have only been 20 reported vehicle crime incidents in the town centre. The Council has made careful use of Alcohol Free Zones in areas e.g. Alvechurch, Rubery etc. and we are currently looking at increasing the powers of our Neighbourhood Wardens and the Police's community support officers, so that they can issue fixed penalty notices. A key aspect of the improvement in crime reduction has been the close working relationship with the Police through the 68 PACT meetings, which address the priorities raised by local residents. For example, Waseley, which has traditionally been an area of higher crime has seen vehicle crime drop by 47%

since 2005/06; domestic burglary by 17% and criminal damage offences have reduced by almost 20%. The Council is very unusual in the level of support it provides to the PACT meetings, compared to the rest of the County and nationally. For example, a nearby excellent rated council does not support PACT, due to a lack of management capacity. We have an excellent working relationship with the Police that reflects this level of support. The Council has also worked in partnership on the “adopt the box” scheme, a joint initiative between the Council and Virgin Media, with residents being provided with an unlimited supply of cable box paint, to cover up graffiti. The Council has also actively worked with its partners to develop a Hate Crime Procedure<sup>31</sup>, which has been rolled out to 22 reporting centres across the District and covers all six equality strands including race .

- 6.19 The Council also offers an extensive range of diversionary activities, including an angling project; free football coaching sessions, delivered by an FA qualified coach; the mainstream funding of the Neighbourhood Warden Scheme who engage with local residents, particularly young people; and the Charford Multi Agency Resource Centre has set up a youth group, with activities like arts, crafts, cooking, sports or just socialising with friends in a safe environment.
- 6.20 Finally, the Council also helps older and vulnerable residents feel safer in their own own homes through its externally accredited Lifeline Service (98.85% of Lifeline calls answered within 30 seconds).

#### Community Engagement

- 6.21 The Council is offering an increasing range of mechanisms for the public to influence the Council’s strategy and services. The Council can track focus group feedback into the selection of its corporate priorities<sup>17</sup>. In direct response to comments from PACT meetings, dedicated mobile area cleaners have been introduced in Charford, Sidemoor and Catshill. The Council has anecdotal i.e. not statistically valid, evidence from PACT meetings and the Parish Council Forum that residents have recognised an improvement in the cleanliness of the District and an improvement in the responsiveness of the Council.
- 6.22 As a result of its two Local Neighbourhood Partnerships, the Council has introduced hanging baskets in Rubery and a new welcome sign, for Veteran’s Day developed a bandstand programme and special event at the Artrix Theatre,; and through Section 106 monies available in Alvechurch young people have agreed how this money is to be spent.
- 6.23 We have previously mentioned that the Council is now using a budget jury to support its budget deliberations, staff have been consulted on the priorities and key deliverables (many of whom live in the District) and consulted the Equalities and Diversity Forum on the Council’s priorities and offered them the opportunity to make community bids for the last two budget rounds. Through the LSP, the Council also supports an annual “town hall” meeting. The Council has a Community Engagement Strategy to help it respond to the two White Papers and will be supporting a participatory budgeting event for children and young people, in partnership with the County Council, in April 2009.

#### Children and Young People

- 6.24 The Council is concerned about the increasing demonization of young people. It has been recognised at County level that district councils have struggled to

engage with the “Every Child Matters” agenda; however, through the LSP, the Council has established a Children and Young People Board<sup>28</sup> and the Council is the District representative on the County thematic group. As mentioned above the Council is seeking to involve children and young people in the democratic process. The involvement of young people in Alvechurch in the decision on how to use section 106 monies is another example of the Council’s developing approach. The Council already provides an extensive range of activities for children and young people including: street theatre, the bonfire night, diversionary activities e.g. the Majors Green Football Scheme, boxing, Sanders Park and St Chads skate parks and play areas. The Council also works with voluntary organisations, for example, re-planting Chestnut Walk, working with the Scouts; and has provided training to nurseries on health and safety issues. The Council also facilitates the Primary Sports Project. This provides high quality physical education in first schools which in turn has led to increased contact and membership of local sports clubs and helps schools meet their healthy schools targets. Other activities include: a swimming gala for primary and second school children; a very successful sports award evening, with sponsorship for each award; the introduction of multi-skills sessions across the District for 5 to 9 year olds to improve their fundamental skills of agility and balance (this also included a multi-skills festival with an excellent turnout); a junior cricket programme, in partnership with Bromsgrove Junior Boars, throughout the Summer, with qualified coaches; a Children and Young People’s Convention to find out what youngsters want in the District; a football tournament at Bromsgrove’s Ryland Centre, which kicked off a series of sporting projects across the District, delivered by the Sports Development Team, in partnership with the County Council and the voluntary sector and the setting up of a Gymnastics Club by the Sports Development Team, in partnership with the Wyre Forest Gymnastics Club and North Worcestershire School Sports Partnership. Through the 2008/2009 budget cycle the Council has invested in a further two sports development officers for a team that already has an excellent reputation.

- 6.25 The Council is also working hard to improve the physical play areas for young people. The Council has recently opened the Lickey and Blackwell playground (£40,000 funding from Council). The Council was also recently successful in winning £200,000 from the Big Lottery Fund to improve play facilities across the District. The money will be spent on £50,000 for multi-use games areas at Callowbrook Park, £40,000 towards teenager adventure play area at Wythall Park, £40,000 towards expanding and improving existing equipment at the Wythall Hollywood Lane play area, £35,000 to improve existing play facilities in Sidemoor and £35,000 to revamp the Infants play area at Mayfarm Close.
- 6.26 As a result of this priority, only 10% of residents felt they did not belong to their local area and 64% felt it was a nice place to live.

### **Council Priority Five - Clean District and Recycling**

#### Clean District

- 6.27 As a result of the employment of additional street cleansing staff and investment in new sweepers, graffiti removal systems, area cleaners and hit squads, the proportion of land suffering from unacceptable levels of detritus is now below the local authority average. 85% of our streets now meet the Government’s standards for cleanliness compared to 65% a year ago. This improvement is also reflected in improving customer perception (insert

Customer Panel data). The Council's Community Safety Team has also worked in partnership with the Probation Service on local area improvements like the clearing of alleys in Rubery; and dedicated mobile area cleaners have also been introduced and received positive customer feedback. In 2007, the Council won a Green Apple Award for its street cleansing service.

- 6.28 100% of abandoned vehicle reports are investigated within 24 hours of notification (top quartile) and almost 100% removed within 24 hours of the Council being able to do so (top quartile). Similarly, the Council removes all animal debris within agreed timescales and deals with almost all fly tips within our response times.

### Recycling

- 6.29 Recycling rates are amongst most improved in country with the levels of recycling being in the top 50 in the country at over 40%. The Council has supported this improved delivery through a clearer collection policy, the introduction of a clearer Christmas calendar as a result of customer feedback) and a green waste collection. We have also set up four new bring banks, especially for Tetra Pak beverage cartons, in partnership with Tetra Pak Ltd. The majority of residual waste that is collected is diverted to Combined Heat and Power plants reducing the amount of waste required for landfill.
- 6.30 The Council actively supports public education on recycling. We run a "Recycle Now" week with drop in sessions; "Waste Stop Shops" so that residents can find out more about recycling; the design and delivery by young people of a green scheme post card to encourage recycling, Recycler, the hip hop Rapping Robot visited 10 schools in the District to encourage the three Rs of recycling and a Recycling Bus tour has visited the District's village to give advice and guidance on the best way to recycle.
- 6.31 Our focus and investment means that 81% of residents now use one of the Council's recycling facilities and 84% are satisfied with the recycling service.

### **Other Achievements**

- 6.32 Not all of our services are covered by the priorities, but Improvement is a Council wide objective and staff have worked very hard over the last few years to turn around the performance of the Council across all of our services. Other achievements that Council has made include:-
- The Council is a partner with Advantage West Midlands on the Bromsgrove Technology Park. Basepoint PLC has a building there. Basepoint is a technology centre with "incubator" units to grow new businesses. The Council, in partnership with NEW college operates a successful business start up programme with 90 start ups over the last three years and a 70% survival rate.
  - The Council also runs a monthly farmers market in Bromsgrove town centre and a Christmas market.
  - Over 30 business start ups in 2007/2008 with a business survival rate of 75%.
  - Satisfaction with parks and open spaces is high and improving. Green Flag Sanders Park.

- Only 10% of residents use the Dolphin Centre on a weekly basis and 63% have used it or stopped. As a result, the Council has refurbished the gym facilities (£850,000) at the Dolphin Centre and the transfer of the Centre to a Charitable Trust. Facilities updated to “state of the art” fitness suite.
- A number of teams in the Culture and Communities Department are QUEST accredited. The Planning and Environment Department Building Control Service is ISO9000 accredited and the Environment Health section achieved the highest average score for enforcement practices in a county wide audit. The Council is one of a very few local authorities nationally to have served Noise Abatement Notices in order to prevent nuisance trains (squealing train wheels) from travelling through the District. The Council’s Environmental Health Commercial Team and Legal Services has undertaken a number of high profile prosecutions of local businesses which have received local and regional press coverage, with two cases featuring in a national journal.
- The Council is contributing to a better environment through its recycling service and parks service, in particular, the recent award of a Green Flag for Sanders Park. The Council has also recently signed up to the Worcestershire Climate Change Declaration and has employed the Energy Savings Trust to undertake a review of its activities<sup>25</sup>. Domestic energy efficiency is up to 22.68% (2005/06) from a 2003 baseline of 5% and on target to achieve 2011 target of 30%<sup>26</sup>.
- The Planning Service has seen a significant improvement in its performance. This performance is high in the top quartile and should place the Council well within the top 50 performing authorities, compared to being one of the worst performing councils in 2005/06 (250<sup>th</sup> (approx) out of 285 councils). This has been achieved by a combination of resourcing, clearer accountabilities and responsibilities, improved processes and the introduction of 3 planning surgeries per week.
- An extensive consultation on the options for the future of the Longbridge site has been undertaken. As one of the two planning authorities the Council was not able to respond to this consultation; however, the LSP responded to the Issues and Options<sup>14</sup> consultation supporting the mixed development option, which aims to create 10,000 jobs.
- Since its BFI inspection in 2005 the Benefits Service has seen a significant improvement in its performance. The average number of days taken for processing new claims and the average number of days taken to process a change of circumstance have dramatically improved, falling from 37.81 days in 2005/06 to 26.33 days in 2007/08 and 11.88 days in 2005/06 to 6 days in 2007/08. The Council is also now delivering most of the DWP performance standards.
- Benefits Overpayments/fraud – more collected and more fined than before. Top quartile performance at 87.48%, compared to 65.96% the previous year.

- 100% successful prosecutions as a result of improved capacity and bringing service in-house.
- Outsourced sales advertising for Together Bromsgrove, making the three editions self funding and saving the Council £20,000.
- Half way through registering all Council's land, which is significantly ahead of other councils and means we are now selling this service to other councils.
- Procurement savings achieved of over £80,000 per annum.
- Introduction of the "Scores on the Doors" food establishment rating service.
- Development of a County wide Air Quality Strategy aimed at reducing emissions, better planning, transport and controlled areas.
- External funding secured for Improvement Manager to help deliver spatial project, programme management etc.
- Merger of Culture and Communities and StreetScene and Waste Management Department and savings delivered.
- New reprographics service, including new printers and reduced costs (figures).
- Significant reduction in local authority error rate, which has meant the payment of more subsidies by Central Government (£200,000). Achieved 100% for last quarter (quarter 4 2007/2008).
- Installation of new land and property gazetteer which will underpin all the spatial systems and significantly improve the service to customers, by providing a single database for updating change of address details.
- 27,000 people pay their Council Tax by Direct Debit which contributes to our very high collection rates (second quartile). There are 37,000 properties.
- IIP Re-accreditation achieved.
- Winning business seminars for private sector companies who want to get contracts with the public sector. Over 100 delegates. Joint initiative with Redditch BC.
- Development of a "Flooding Matters" leaflet with top tips for homes affected by the recent floods.
- Introduction of a new way of calculating housing benefit, through the Local Housing Allowance, introduced in April 2008.
- £1,612,000 savings target agreed for 2008/2009 in order to release money into priority areas.

- Licensing Policy short and simple to use. Praised by British Beer and Pub Association for short length of policy and easy of use.
- Sickness absence has dropped to 9.35 days per FTE for 2007/2008, compared to 10.66 in the previous year. The estimated outturn for 2008/2009 will see sickness levels drop below the local authority average.
- The Council is in the top quartile for paying invoices within 30 days.
- The Council is top quartile for collecting Council Tax.
- 100% of the Environmental Health best practice list achieved.

## **7. Conclusions**

7.1 This self assessment demonstrates that the Council has made a dramatic improvement since its 2007 CPA. The Council has self assessed itself as good and is ambitious to achieve excellence. In writing the self assessment, the Council is aware that:-

- the District is essentially an affluent one and the societal problems it faces are ones of affluence, for example, affordable housing, very high customer expectations and a town centre that does reflect the wealth of the District;
- to achieve excellence, the Council now needs to address these longer term outcomes;
- in order to deliver this agenda the Council needs to further develop its capacity. The joint chief executive with Redditch BC, working with our partners to lever in resources into the District, delivering efficiency savings through a strong value for money culture, alternative ways of meeting service delivery; generating income and improving Member and officer skills are key to meeting this challenging agenda; and
- finally tackling all of the above is dependent on stable and sustainable political leadership from all parties. The Council recognises this and will continue to pay close attention to this agenda to ensure the governance of the Council is sound and enables officers to deliver a District where people are proud to live and work.

## Self Assessment Score by Council

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Self Assessed Score</b>
<b>Ambition</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Prioritisation</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Capacity</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Performance Management</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Achievement and Improvement</b>	<b>3</b>

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## **Q1. What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?**

### **2. Ambition**

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18. Bromsgrove District Council, *A Strong Voice for Bromsgrove District* (March 2006 Cabinet).
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6. Bromsgrove District Council, *Improvement Plan* (August 2006 Cabinet).
7. Bromsgrove District Council, *Recovery Plan Update* (June 2006 Performance Management Board).
8. Bromsgrove District Council, *Council's Project Management Methodology* (June 2006 Performance Management Board).
9. Bromsgrove District Council, *Customer First Strategy* (March 2006 Cabinet).
10. Bromsgrove District Council, *Spatial Project Business Case* (2006).
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13. Bromsgrove District Council, *A Strong Voice for Bromsgrove District (March 2006 Cabinet)*.
14. Bromsgrove District Council, *People Strategy (2006)*.
15. Bromsgrove District Council, *Inclusive Equalities Scheme, Working Draft Version (December 2006)*.
16. Bromsgrove District Council, *Capital Strategy (March 2006)*.
17. Bromsgrove District Council, *Value for Money Strategy, (January 2007 Cabinet)*.
18. Bromsgrove District Council, *Management Development Strategy (October 2006 Cabinet)*.
19. Bromsgrove District Council, *Modern Manager Framework (2006)*.
20. Bromsgrove District Council, *Medium Term Financial Plan (December 2006 Cabinet)*.
21. Bromsgrove District Council, *Housing Strategy 2006-2011, Unlocking the Door to Meeting the Housing Needs of Bromsgrove District (2005)*.
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7. Bromsgrove District Council, Customer Feedback System – Not Available to the Public (December 2006 Cabinet).
8. Bromsgrove District Council, Community Influence/Neighbourhood Management Pilot (January 2007 Cabinet).
9. Bromsgrove District Council, Performance Indicators – November Update (January 2007 Performance Management Board), Appendix 3 p.8.
10. Bromsgrove District Council, Strategic Housing Action Plan (2006).
11. Bromsgrove District Council, Core Brief (12 December 2006).
12. Bromsgrove District Council, Connect (December 2006).
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15. Bromsgrove District Council, Council Results 2005/06 (June 2006).
16. Bromsgrove District Council, Council Tax Information 2006-2007.
17. Bromsgrove District Council, Draft Community Plan Annual Report 2005/06 (November 2006).

## Q3. What has been achieved?

### 6. Achievement and Improvement

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2. Bromsgrove District Council, Performance Indicators – November Update (January 2007 Performance Management Board), p.3.
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10. Bromsgrove District Council, Performance Indicators – November Update (January 2007 Performance Management Board), Appendix 3, p.8.
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13. Bromsgrove District Council, Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance Team – November Performance Indicators (January 2007 Team Meeting).

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16. *Bromsgrove District Council, A Strategy for De-commissioning Council Owned Hostels (September 2006 Cabinet).*
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28. *Bromsgrove District Council, Minutes of Children and Young People's Theme Group Meeting (12 January 2007).*
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