



Bromsgrove
District Council

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CPA Self Assessment

Bromsgrove District Council

September 2008



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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. Travel data indicates that 16,643 people travel into the District for work, with 26,112 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

Table 1 – Map of Bromsgrove District



Population and Housing

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 review of the Regional Spatial Strategy Two (RSS2) has identified only 2,100 homes for the District over the next 20 years, with the possibility that the District may have to take some of Redditch Borough Council's housing allocation. The Council is currently engaging with the West Midlands Regional Assembly and Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) to increase this low allocation, as the District has the 11th highest owner occupation rate in England and Wales and the need for affordable housing far exceeds this allocation. The Council is working with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) on a district wide housing market assessment in order to provide more detailed evidence on the Bromsgrove housing market, which can then be fed into the RSS revision process.

The black and minority ethnic population (BME) is only 3.3%, which is low for the region and nationally. This BME percentage 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. These are important customer groups for the Council and we have community engagement arrangements in place to ensure we understand their concerns. Equally, it is important that we listen to our young people (who are statistically less likely to vote and engage in the political process); again, we have arrangements in place.

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. It is too early to predict the impact of the “credit crunch”, but it may affect these projects. A recent Labour Market survey identified a significant income gap between those who commute out to work and those who live and work in the District.

Sustainable Development

The new Local Area Agreement (LAA) has a number of challenging environment targets. The Council is a signatory of the Nottingham Agreement and Worcestershire Climate Pledge. 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. Despite these initiatives the Council recognises that it will need to increase its focus on this area in order to meet the LAA targets, in particular, flood alleviation and carbon emissions.

Education, Deprivation and Health

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. The District’s population is healthier than the regional average. The general affluence of the District makes identifying the more vulnerable in our communities difficult.

Crime and Fear of Crime

There has been a 31.9% reduction in headline comparator crime in the District over the last three years; however, our customers’ top priority is reducing the fear of crime.

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 Council has an Acting Joint Chief Executive of Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council, Kevin Dicks. The Council has a net budget of £11.733m (2008/09) and a Government Grant of £4.858m. The Council employs 358 staff.

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

2. Ambitions for the Community

- 2.1 The Council's ambition for the community reflects our customers, stakeholders and staff ambitions and is based on clear evidence. 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, were developed through our change programme "Building Pride" (staff were consulted about this strap line and 80% of staff supported it when surveyed). The programme recognised that the Council needed 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 being 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 the Recycling being a priority.
- 2.3 The Council has used a number of focus groups¹ and three high quality customer panels to help find out about residents' views and satisfaction. This consultation has been supported by a range of other community engagement mechanisms like the Disabled Users Group (DUG), Equalities and Diversity Forum, Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings, "Town Hall" meetings, Parish Forums and two pilot Local Neighbourhood Partnerships. The Council is confident that it understands its customers' ambitions.
- 2.4 Our customers' ambitions 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.
- 2.5 Key strategies flow from the Community Strategy, in particular, the Council Plan, service business plans and a corporate improvement plan, produced annually, which underpins the delivery of the Council Plan. Besides setting its own strategic agenda within the District, the Council is increasingly working at a County level to support our customers' ambitions, for example, we are the lead district for affordable housing.
- 2.6 The Council has developed a shared purpose and leadership at the top of the organisation. Through the I&DeA Top Team Development Programme Cabinet and CMT have been able to work together on articulating our customers' ambitions. Similarly, the Leader of the Council has also established a Leader's Meeting, to which all Group Leaders are invited. Naturally, there are political differences, but increasingly there is common ground of issues like affordable housing, Longbridge, the train station, children and young people and working with our communities. These shared ambitions are underpinned by more formal mechanisms to support good governance, including; a Member/officer protocol⁷, a Member/Member protocol⁸, job descriptions for

key Member positions⁹, a Management Competency Framework¹⁰ (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.

- 2.7 Getting residents to understand the difficult trade-offs that politicians need to make is a national political issue and one the Council recognises. 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 ran its first Children and Young People's convention in 2007, with a follow up event planned for January 2009, which will see monies delegated to children and young people for them to decide how it should be spent.
- 2.8 The Council has worked hard and invested in listening to its customers. The Council would accept it needs to go further to develop customer intelligence in line with best practice, but it should be recognised that it already invests more in this area than most district councils. 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 to support the work of departments. The Council is well placed to respond to the Audit Commission's customer insight agenda and has plans to consider customer insight software like Mosaic and Acorn.
- 2.9 Through these mechanisms, the Council has a strongly developed understanding of its customers and communities and the scale of the challenge it faces. The basic challenge for the Council are problems that come with affluence e.g. expensive housing, a town centre that does not reflect the wealth of the District and high customer expectations. The Council also understands the diversity issues that apply to the District. The Council has developed an Inclusive Equalities Scheme, supported by the Disabled Users Group and Equality and Diversity Forum. These provide Members and senior officers with specific 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 (now addressed), 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 delivering its customers' 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.
- 2.12 The previous CPA identified external communications as an issue for the Council. The Council has invested in an experienced Communications and Customer First Manager and as a result improved its press coverage and updated its residents' magazine "Together Bromsgrove", which helps articulate the Council's (and our partners') ambitions. Recent customer feedback identified that 61% found "Together Bromsgrove" useful. Through the "Town Hall" meeting, "Chat with the Chief"; Parish

Forums and PACT meetings, the Council has also worked hard to ensure our customers have regular opportunities to meet senior Members and senior officers. Similarly, the Council has recognised the value of communications and dialogue with our staff; informed and engaged staff will provide better customer service, so 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 process⁵, 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.

3. Prioritisation

- 3.1 The Council has translated its customers', stakeholders' and staffs' ambitions into a clear set of priorities. The Council has achieved this through a very strong annual business cycle which ensures the right priorities are set and that these drive investment decisions. The strategic priorities are set out in the Council Plan (a rolling three year plan), which in turn drives the service business planning process and the 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. The Council has significantly improved its service delivery to its customers over the last two years and this reflects the effectiveness of the Council's prioritisation. Examples include; the town centre toilets, affordable housing units, customer feedback system, street theatre across the District and more street cleansing.
- 3.2 The Council starts the process of prioritisation by producing the annual Council Plan Part 1 report, which provides a "state of the district" position statement, which clearly evidences the link between proposed priorities and our customers' feedback from the Customer Panel, budget jury, equalities and diversity conference, as well as service delivery data. The report also defines the Council's Objectives in broad terms³ and links these to national policy and the Worcestershire Local Area Agreement. By providing a broad definition for each Objective, the Council's leadership can then 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 Sense of Community a priority (this includes community events, community engagement, the Every Child Matters agenda and community safety), but has not made Well Being a priority i.e. the Choosing Health agenda because the health profile of the District is comparatively good. This does not mean that the Council does not contribute to this national objective or recognise that lifestyles are an issue just that it will attract less resourcing than other aspects of the national, regional and local agenda, which have been identified as priorities. .
- 3.3 The Council is as explicit as any political organisation can be about what are not its priorities. The Council has adopted a simple approach. 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, with the movement of £1.6m of funding (2008/2009) behind our customers' priorities. This was not easy to achieve and 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 passes for the over 60s, whilst at the same time going through Single Status with staff. These have all been difficult political decisions, but by using the evidence available to the Council from our customer feedback systems, along with a proper consideration of national

and regional policy, the Council has been able to invest in what is most important to customers and disinvest in other areas. For example, through our Customer Panel we know that our customers were very concerned about the cleanliness of the District, so we have invested in more area cleaners and new equipment; similarly, we know that our customers are least satisfied with progress on regenerating the town centre, so while we undertake the longer term work on completing an area action plan, we are investing now in quick wins like new toilet facilities.

- 3.4 Our customers would rightly expect us to make connections between priorities and act in a joined up manner. The planned redevelopment of the town centre, includes not just a thriving market town (corporate priority 1), but also improved housing (corporate priority 2), improved customer access, through community transport and highways improvements (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. We have also actively involved our customers in the service delivery planning for these projects through site visits and through customers sitting on project groups, for example, the community transport project and railway station project.
- 3.5 The Council has invested considerable energy in communicating our priorities to our customers and stakeholders through “Together Bromsgrove”, “Chats with the Chief”, Parish Forums and “Town Hall” meetings, but we recognise that we need to work harder on increasing the political engagement and understand our customers (something that has been identified as a national issue in the recent White Paper: “Communities in Control”). Members, senior officers and staff are clear about the Council’s priorities. In the last Employee Survey 75% of staff said their manager helped them understand the Council’s priorities. Staff are consulted at the inception of the prioritisation process through Staff Forums (and the Managers’ Forum). As a result of feedback from staff (which was consistent with the feedback received from our budget jury with our customers) we are proposing to amend some of the priorities for the forthcoming budget round.
- 3.6 After the Council Plan Part 1 has been agreed by September’s Full Council, service business plans are produced with budget bids and savings aligned to the selected priorities. The recent housing inspection commented favourably on this process and the strong alignment between the Council’s priorities and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Through the autumn and winter, the service business plans and financial information are considered in detail by both Members and senior officers, before the budget is agreed in January and the Council Plan published by the 31 March each year.
- 3.7 Finally, 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 Communications Team originated from Walsall MBC). Improvements to the performance management regime have been adopted from the experiences of Rotherham (performance clinics) and Derby City council (Performance Management Strategy). The Council has: undertaken an emergency planning exercise with the support of other councils; researched Warwickshire County Council’s and Bracknell Forest’s approaches to town centre redevelopment; visited Northamptonshire County Council to learn about its approach to diversity; visited Wychavon District Council to find out about their sports trust; met with Watford Borough Councils Chief Executive to find out about their change management programme and Kettering District Council to learn about their planning function. The Council has also worked with GOWM and BDHT on trying to develop innovative approaches to affordable housing.

4. Capacity

- 4.1 Member/officer relations have been a key issue for the Council. These relations have significantly improved over the last two 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.
- 4.3 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.
- 4.5 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 has 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 Constitution¹⁷ and Scheme of Delegation¹⁸ 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 Plan⁸ of all decisions to be sought from the Cabinet over a four month period.
- 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; again, these are reported on quarterly.
- 4.8 The Council is self aware about its capacity. The Council requested a CPA in 2007 in order to test our plans for improvement (and self assessed itself as Poor). 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 drew 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. The Council also operates a separate risk register for this high profile project and it is covered in the corporate risk register.

- 4.9 The need to invest in our customers' priorities and rapidly improve the Council's service delivery has provided a strong focus for improving the Council's value for money. The Council has a Value for Money (VFM) Strategy, supported by corporate and departmental action plans. Value for money improvements include: SLAs with BDHT, the Artrix and BARN, the imminent transfer of the payroll function, the merger of two departments, reduced paper costs through new printers and improvements to the reprographics section, improved procurement practices (including an annual savings target of £80,000), increased sponsorship and of course, the Joint Chief Executive project. The Council has also benchmarked its VFM approach with an 4 out of 4 Use of Resources council and concluded Bromsgrove has stronger processes in place to achieve VFM, but needs time to let these take effect. The Council expects to improve its Use of Resources VFM score to 2 out of 4 when it is next assessed. The Council recognises that its current VFM profile is mixed³ and the use of benchmarking profiles remains an area for improvement. The Council expects to address this through the forthcoming development of detailed joint service business cases for phase three of the Joint Chief Executive project.
- 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 managers training programme, Top Team programme and Member Development programme. Improved management practices can be evidenced through the Employee Survey, the IIP re-accreditation and ultimately through the improved service delivery to our customers.
- 4.12 Similarly, the Council's People Strategy⁹ and practices effectively support the corporate priorities. Through the Strategy, the Council has introduced a significant range of people management techniques to improve capacity within its workforce. These include Personal Development Reviews (PDRs) for all staff (a corporately monitored target by Members), a skills audit, a new capability procedure¹³, new Sickness Absence Policy¹⁴, new disciplinary procedure and anti-bullying and harassment procedures. The Council monitors sickness absence, staff turnover, early retirements and a range of indicators to ensure its workforce is representative of the community¹⁵. Sickness levels are second quartile and falling and 100% of staff have received a PDR. Turnover levels did increase with the announcement of the job evaluation results, but the Council carefully monitors the impact of job vacancies on performance through monthly performance reporting to the Corporate Management Team. Because the Council is currently undergoing Single Status, it has re-programmed the launch of workforce planning to 2009/10.
- 4.13 The Council makes extensive use of Information Communications Technology (ICT) to support service delivery and improve customer service. 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 and the corporate gazetteer has now been launched. 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. The Council has also invested in a customer feedback system (complaints and compliments) and a queue management system for the CSC, in addition to the customer relationship management system that is already in place at the CSC. Future developments are likely to focus on improving customer access through self service on the Internet, obtaining customer insight data through systems like Mosaic and vehicle cab technology to reduce missed bins.

- 4.14 The Council has a clear project management methodology. The Council operates a Programme Board, chaired by the Acting Joint Chief Executive, which supplements the work of the Corporate Management Team and provides a setting for a more detailed consideration of the various project documents required, using the Council's project management methodology.
- 4.15 Finally, the Council is prepared to use long term partnerships and joint working with other local authorities and organisations to deliver service improvements to our customers. The Council successfully transferred its housing stock to BDHT in 2004. Relations with the Trust are now good, with the BDHT Chief Executive sitting on the LSP Board and Chairing the Housing Theme Group. BDHT is the preferred RSL partner for the Council and we have a joint priority of affordable housing. In 2005, the Council opened its one stop shop, the CSC in partnership with the County Council. The Council has a track record of working with (and funding) 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 a SLA with BARN, the voluntary sector infrastructure organisation.

5. Performance Management

- 5.1 The Council can demonstrate that it understands its customers' priorities, has prioritised these and invested in them, but to deliver real improvements on the ground, that our customers will notice, the Council has needed to invest in a robust performance management framework, so that it can manage the process of improvement.
- 5.2 The basic framework consists of the Council Plan, service business plans, team action plans and PDRs. Challenge is provided through the Performance Management Board, monthly meetings between each portfolio holder and head of service(s) 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.

- 5.5 Performance management is fully integrated with the management of resources through the production of the Council Plan Part 1 report, which summarises the performance issues from the previous outturn and their impact on future years' corporate priorities. As a result housing, a clean district and customer service were all made priorities.
- 5.6 Customer focus is understood and is a central driver for the Council's performance. The CSC is the main customer interface for the Council and receives over 7,000 calls per month. The CSC produces a detailed monthly report, which is considered each month by the Customer First Board, with key measures being reported to CMT and Members. The CSC also has data on the performance of neighbouring CSCs, so it can compare its performance. The Council now consistently answers calls to the CSC in less than 30 seconds, with the customer going straight through to a customer service adviser and over 90% of calls being resolved at the CSC. This is a very high quality service and the CSC has been identified as an example of best practice between both tiers of local government. More importantly our customers recognise this, with 73% of the Customer Panel being prepared to recommend the CSC to a friend. The Council has worked hard to ensure that its Customer First value is embedded across all of its departments. All staff have received Customer First Training, both in 2007 and 2008 (with more planned in 2009). 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 more difficult customer issues which require cross tier working.
- 5.7 In addition to the CSC the Council is making use of other customer performance management techniques to drive improved service delivery. The Council is beginning to use mystery shopping exercises. The Council also operates a Customer Panel and is now tracking customer satisfaction every year. In January 2008 the Council launched its Customer Feedback System. 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 and complaint figures are supplied monthly to CMT, Cabinet and the Performance Management Board. A more detailed report is produced quarterly which analyses trends in the data. The role of the 68 annual PACT meetings in improving the performance of the Council and increasing customer satisfaction should not be underestimated. PACT is a form of customer performance management; residents vote on their top three concerns, which are then allocated to a police officer or Council officer (attached to each PACT). Progress on the three priorities is then reported back to residents at the next meeting. The evidence from PACT meetings is anecdotal, but it strongly suggests this process is working. Staff also have clear mechanisms for feeding back to senior management through "ConnectWithKev" "back to the floor" and Staff Forums. 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. The Council also operates a clear and publicised grievance procedure for more formal matters.
- 5.9 In order to embed both the customer and performance culture across the Council, Core Brief regularly reports to staff on our performance figures and the Improvement Plan¹¹, the Acting Joint Chief Executive writes the lead article in the staff magazine "Connect"¹² which updates staff on key developments and 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 and has introduced a staff suggestion scheme "Bright Ideas"¹³. 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. The Council believes its approach to performance management is now embedded.

- 5.10 Finally, the Council formally reports its performance to its customers through its Annual Report (integrated with financial reporting) which is published on the Internet and reported in more detail through a "wrap around" in the local press. The Council publishes performance information as part of the Council Tax leaflet¹⁶. The Council also reports on its performance through the 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 like the town centre regeneration and train station redevelopment.

6. Achievement and Improvement

Overall Performance

- 6.1 The Council's Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) provide the main mechanism by which service delivery to the customer can be compared with other councils and nationally. The 2007/2008 outturn figures show that 72% of BVPI's improved during the year, building on the 59% increase the year before. 60% of the BVPIs are now above the local authority median (compared to 2006/07 quartile positions) with only 17% in the bottom quartile, continuing the significant improvement trend. This performance has been sustained into 2008/2009. The tables below set out the 2007/2008 performance:-.

	BVPIs		Local Pls	
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				
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		
Top quartile	20%	31%
2 nd quartile	18%	29%
3 rd 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. Key achievements to date include:-

- The establishment of a joint County Council/District Council Project Board for the town centre and joint appointment of a town centre project manager.
- Agreement by the County Council to set aside a net £5m for asset investment in the town centre and also the agreement to fund a full accessibility study of the town centre, which should lead to a new town centre layout with reduced through traffic and increased footfall.
- A £12m funding package for the redevelopment of the Bromsgrove railway station should be agreed this autumn (the Council has previously financially contributed to the feasibility study for the station).
- Funding of a new toilet block in the town centre, including a high dependency unit for adults and children with disabilities (£174,000).
- A major retailer is currently being sought for the market hall site.
- An Issues and Options paper is currently out to consultation. This consultation is the pre-cursor to the production of an Area Action Plan for the town centre which will provide a blueprint for its future design.
- 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 included 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 customer 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 the town centre multi-story car park after problems with teenage drivers. Achievement of the Safer Parking award and free car parking in Bromsgrove town centre, in the two weekends prior to Christmas.
- The securing of £15,000 of sponsorship from the private sector for community events, through the work of the Celebratory Group.

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 has 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 is engaging with the West Midlands Regional Assembly and GOWM in an attempt to address the low allocation within the RSS2 housing figures and is increasing its evidence base through undertaking a Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). The Council also chairs the South Housing Market Area Partnership. The Council has delivered the Government's 2010 target for reducing the number of households living in temporary accommodation and has 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. The Council has also introduced a choice based lettings scheme.
- 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 closed¹⁶ 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)²⁷, 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 may need to be released in the near future.

Council Priority Three – Customer Service

- 6.8 The CSC is consistently resolving over 95% of customer calls at the first point of contact and is answering calls in less than 30 seconds. 73% of customers would recommend the service to a friend.
- 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.
- 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. This year 83% of our customer panel found it easy to contact the Council, compared to 54% the previous year. The Council is updating its Customer First Strategy to further improve access to services. 61% of residents found the resident magazine useful.
- 6.13 Finally, the Council has, in partnership with SCOPE, undertaken an accessibility audit of all Council buildings³⁰ 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 offering 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 whilst 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 Women’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, “Veterans’ 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 have seen a 31.9% 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 affect 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. 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 like Alvechurch and Rubery 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; and we have also worked in partnership with the Police on marking people's property with SmartWater. The Council has also actively worked with its partners to develop a Hate Crime Procedure³¹, 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 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 priorities¹⁷. In direct response to comments from PACT meetings, dedicated mobile area cleaners have been introduced in Charford, Sidemoor and Catshill. The recent Customer Panel results show a 16 percentage point increase in positive satisfaction with street cleanliness.
- 6.22 As a result of its two Local Neighbourhood Partnerships, the Council has introduced hanging baskets and a new welcome sign in Rubery and developed a bandstand programme and special event at the Artrix Theatre for Veterans' Day; 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 the Equalities and Diversity Forum on made a number of successful community bids which have included money for Black History Month, Diwali and a play by people with learning disabilities. 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 demonisation 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 Board²⁸ 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, 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.

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 89% 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 (see 6.21 above). To achieve these results the Council has invested in the employment of additional street cleansing staff, new sweepers, graffiti removal systems, area cleaners and hit squads. 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. 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 the most improved in England with the levels of recycling being in the top 50 in the country at over 40% and satisfaction data being top quartile. The Council has supported this improved delivery through a 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 villages 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 customer service and 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 runs a farmers market in Bromsgrove town centre and a Christmas market.
 - 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.
 - Satisfaction with parks and open spaces is high and improving and Sanders Park has achieved Green Flag status.
 - The Council is refurbishing the gym facilities (£850,000) at the Dolphin Centre and is in the process of transferring the Centre to a Charitable Trust.
 - 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 have 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.
 - Domestic energy efficiency is up to 22.68% (2005/06) from a 2003 baseline of 5% and is on target to achieve 2011 target of 30%²⁶.
 - The Planning Service has seen a significant improvement in its performance. Performance is 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.

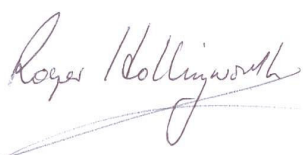
- An extensive consultation on the options for the future of the Longbridge site has been undertaken.
- The average number of days taken for processing new claims and the average number of days taken to process a change of circumstance have dramatically improved, falling from 37.81 days in 2005/06 to 26.33 days in 2007/08 and 11.88 days in 2005/06 to 6 days in 2007/08.
- A significant reduction in benefits payment error rate, which has meant the payment of more subsidies by Central Government (£200,000). Achieved 100% for last quarter (quarter 4 2007/2008).
- Sales advertising for Together Bromsgrove has increased by £14,000.
- The Council is 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.
- A new reprographics service, including new printers and reduced costs of printing.
- 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 households pay their Council Tax by Direct Debit which contributes to our very high collection rates (second quartile). There are 37,000 properties.
- Investors in People (IIP) re-accreditation achieved and examples of best practice cited.
- "Winning Business" seminars for private sector companies who want to get contracts with the public sector, with over 100 delegates attending.
- 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.
- Introduction of a new Licensing Policy which is short and simple to use and has been praised by the British Beer and Pub Association for its ease 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.
- 100% of the Environmental Health best practice list achieved.
- Positive feedback from the recent Food Standards Agency inspection.

7. Conclusions

7.1 This self assessment demonstrates that the Council has made a dramatic improvement to the manner and effectiveness of provision of local services since the 2007 CPA. In the last CPA it was too early to evidence the impact on our customers of this improved performance, but through our recent customer satisfaction survey, the customer feedback system and anecdotal evidence from community meetings like PACT, we are now seeing a rise in customer satisfaction. As a result, 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 a relatively affluent one and the societal problems it faces are ones that come with affluence, for example, affordable housing, very high customer expectations and a town centre that does not reflect the general 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 project with Redditch BC is key to developing this capacity; and
- 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.



Roger Hollingworth
Leader of the Council



Kevin Dicks
Acting Joint Chief Executive

Self Assessment Score by Council

Theme	Self Assessed Score
Ambition	2
Prioritisation	2
Capacity	2
Performance Management	3
Achievement and Improvement	3

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Q3. What has been achieved?

6. Achievement and Improvement

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