



Bromsgrove
District Council

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CPA Self Assessment

Bromsgrove District Council

January 2007



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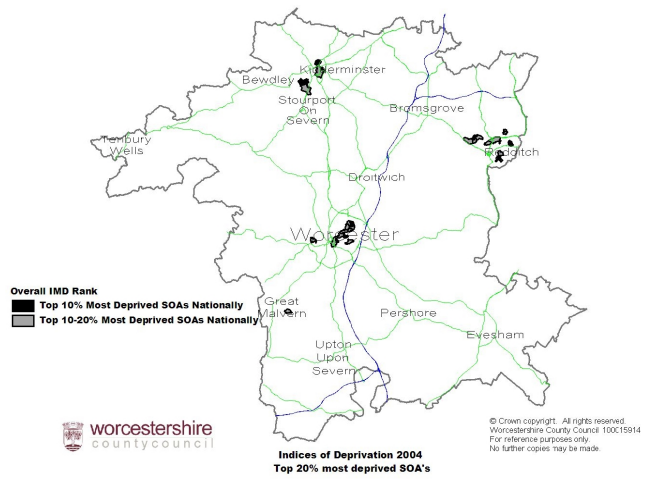
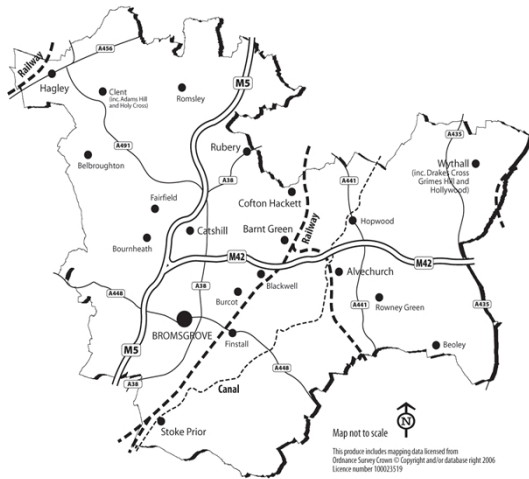
1. Local Authority Context and Summary

Geography and Communities

- 1.1 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 (see 1.5). 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

Table 2 – Map of County Deprivation



- 1.2 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 9,469¹. Our main communities are detailed in Table 1. The District has no wards in the top 20% most deprived in England (see Table 2 above)².

Population

- 1.3 The population of the District is 90,550³ with the District experiencing a 0.8% increase between 2003 and 2004 (the joint highest in Worcestershire)⁴. This increase is mainly attributable to inward migration as a result of a number of large housing developments, with the District clearly being viewed as an attractive location to live and work in (or commute from). The District's population is also set to expand by a further 0.9% between 2006 and 2010, the second highest in Worcestershire (some districts in the County are predicted to see a contraction in their population during the same period)⁵. The black and minority ethnic population (BME) is only 3.3%⁶ 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% Chinese⁷. There are 37,798⁸ households in the District. Over 25% of households contain only one older person⁹. An estimated 6,964 households in the District have one or more members in an identified special needs group¹⁰. This is 19.1% of all households in the District, well above the national average¹¹; of these 56.7% have a physical disability and 37% are frail elderly¹².

Economy

- 1.4 The economic picture of the District is generally very positive. The mean household income is £36,906¹³, which is the highest in the County (the County average is £32,699). There are two major areas of economic concern within the District: the redevelopment of the Longbridge site and Bromsgrove town centre. 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 employment levels naturally increased with the closure, the District's unemployment levels have returned to very low levels (2.5%)¹⁴. The Town Centre needs a major overhaul to encourage local shopping and compete with neighbouring shopping centres. The number of VAT registered businesses in the District has also fallen in recent years¹⁵.

Sustainable Development

- 1.5 One of the biggest issues facing the District is affordable housing: 83.4% of households are owner occupied¹⁶, the 11th highest figure in England and Wales and house prices are rising faster than the national average with the average house price being £219,949¹⁷. 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 five years¹⁸.

Education, Deprivation and Health

- 1.6 The percentage of the population qualified to NVQ Level 4 is significantly higher than average¹⁹. GCSE results gained at local authority schools and colleges in Worcestershire in 2004 were amongst the highest in the country (56.1% achieved five or more GCSEs at A*-C)²⁰. The District ranks 293rd out of 354 councils on the national index of multiple deprivation 2004 (where one is the most deprived)²¹, making the District one of the least deprived nationally. Sidemoor is the most deprived area of the District and only 4,050 households are in receipt of housing or council tax benefits in the District²², 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.
- 1.7 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 for our young people. The most recent Primary Care Trust (PCT) annual report²³ noted that our children's health is good, but there is a need for more child and adolescent mental health services. The PCT retain a concern (shared by the Council's own Community Safety Team) that domestic violence remains "common place". Between 2000-2003 teenage pregnancies increased marginally across Worcestershire (the overall rate is significantly lower than England as a whole).

Crime and Fear of Crime

- 1.8 There has been a 31.9% reduction in headline comparator crime figures for the District over the last three years²⁴. This, together with the Partners and Communities Together (PACT) community meetings, has had a very positive impact on fear of crime in the District: 97% of residents feel safe during daytime and 70% after dark²⁵. Low level crimes like: anti-social behaviour, litter, rubbish, "young people hanging around",

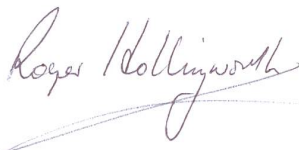
vandalism and criminal damage remain an issue. Drug offences are low. The areas with the highest use in the District are the three prisons. There is a “supply” issue at HMP Blakenhurst and HMP Brockhill. Charford is the only ward where drug use is a significant issue.

Regulatory, Political, Managerial and Financial Context

- 1.9 The Council is currently poor rated and is in voluntary engagement with the DCLG. The Council received its most recent corporate inspection, a Progress Assessment²⁶, in December 2005. As a result of the assessment, six priorities for improvement were agreed with the Audit Commission 1) prioritise resources through the 2006/07 budget process and beyond in line with corporate priorities; 2) ensure effective performance, financial and risk management, in particular, and a SMART and resourced corporate plan (referred to throughout the document as the Council Plan); 3) improved Members’ decision-making and scrutiny; 4) improve cross party working; 5) ensure improvements in service delivery in the Benefits and Streetscene services; and 6) obtain customer feedback on services and link to service improvement. The Council can demonstrate progress on all of these.
- 1.10 The Council has a majority Conservative administration, with 24 Conservatives, six Labour, six independents, two Wythall Residents Association and one Liberal Democrat. The Council operates a modernised political structure with the Leader/Cabinet model, supported by three non-Executive Boards: Audit Board, Scrutiny Steering Board and Performance Management Board. There is also a Planning Committee, Standards Committee and Licensing Committee. The Council has a new Corporate Management Team (CMT), an Acting Chief Executive since May 2006 and an experienced ex-London Borough Chief Executive embedded into the structure as an Improvement Director to provide additional strategic support and mentoring to the Acting Chief Executive. The Council’s relationship with the County Council is a challenge, but the Council does recognise the importance of this relationship.
- 1.11 The Council has a net budget of £11.808m (2007/08), a planned Council Tax increase of 4.99% and Government Grant of £4.729m²⁷. The Council employs 454 staff and the last employee survey identified staff morale as low²⁸ – it is now improving.

CPA Self Assessment and Performance

- 1.12 The Council requested an early CPA against the new 2006 Framework in order to validate our Improvement Plan and identify areas of improvement which will be added to our next Improvement Plan update. We aim to achieve a fair rating in 2008 and ultimately become a council providing excellent services and outcomes for our residents.



Roger Hollingworth
Leader of the Council



Peter McDonald
Leader of the Opposition



Kevin Dicks
Acting Chief Executive

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

2. Ambitions for the Community

- 2.1 Until recently, the Council's strategic focus has been on re-building the Council to be fit for purpose. As a result the Council's ambitions for its communities are not yet fully developed. The Council accepts it needs to develop a stronger evidential understanding of the issues facing the District, improve the external communications of its ambitions, articulate these ambitions through the updates of the Council Plan and Community Plan, develop a number of key strategies e.g. regeneration and health, and better co-ordinate consultation activity.
- 2.2 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 working for the Council through the delivery of long term outcomes and excellent services.
- 2.3 The Council developed its Vision, Values, Objectives and Priorities through a range of focus groups¹. It also met with its key partner agencies to find out their priorities, wrote to every member of staff and appointed a range of staff champions to facilitate staff views and consulted on its priorities at an Equalities and Diversity Consultation Event. The Council has explicitly adopted three of the Bromsgrove Partnership's (District LSP) priorities as Council priorities and accepts the need to improve its understanding of the needs of its communities and its contribution to the fourth priority, the Local Area Agreement (LAA). The Council is addressing this through the Customer Panel and the piloting of two area committees. This information, plus information on performance, demographics and deprivation were brought together on a two day Cabinet/CMT meeting to develop the Council's strategic agenda. In future years, the Council will further develop both the quality of data used and the level of Member involvement, particularly, front line Members.
- 2.4 The Council has a one year Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Targeted (SMART) Improvement Plan² to support the delivery of the Vision. As part of the Improvement Plan the Council has developed four Council Objectives with three year priorities (2007/2010) for each objective³:
 - (1) **Council Objective One: Regeneration** with the Town centre, Longbridge and Housing as its priorities.
 - (2) **Council Objective Two: Improvement**, with Customer Service, Reputation and Performance as its priorities.
 - (3) **Council Objective Three: Sense of Community and Well Being**, with Community Influence and Community Events as its priorities.
 - (4) **Council Objective Four: Environment**, with Clean District and Planning as its priorities.
- 2.5 The Council accepts that its ambitions need to be articulated better through the development of outcome measures and is currently developing a Council Plan 2007/2010 to be issued in February 2007, which will include a set of corporate key deliverables framed as outcome measures, milestones, linked to the County wide Local Area Agreement⁴ and integrated into the medium term financial plan.

- 2.6 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. Press releases are also sent to all staff on e-mail 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 .
- 2.7 During 2007, the Council will focus on the external communication of its ambitions. The Council has recently appointed a Communications and Customer First Manager; intends to overhaul its resident's magazine and double the number of issues to address this and has also recently adopted a Statement of Community Involvement⁶. The Council is not unique in being concerned about the lack of understanding within our communities on the balances that have been struck when developing our plans and why.
- 2.8 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 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.
- 2.9 The Council is currently taking steps to identify longer term sustainable outcomes that it and its partners can achieve, through a bid to the Government's Intervention Fund¹¹. The LSP Board has four agreed priorities; the town centre, Longbridge, affordable housing and contribution to the Local Area Agreement¹². Whilst there is a reasonable degree of clarity about the first three priorities, the fourth priority is currently underdeveloped. Through the bid, the Council aims to carry out further work on identifying the social, economic and environmental issues the District faces, what contribution the LSP Board can make to addressing these (using the LAA as a strong starting point), and developing a stronger performance management framework.
- 2.10 The Council commissioned a series of focus groups on customer service¹³ and the budget as part of its 2006/07 and 2007-2010 budget preparations. The Council's Consultation Policy¹⁴ requires each service business plan to contain a consultation plan. Recent consultations include: the Gambling Act, the issues and options for the future of Longbridge and its Inclusive Equalities Scheme¹⁵, which was launched at a Equalities and Diversity Consultation Event in September 2006. The Council also sends senior officers to the Partners And Communities Together community meetings, holds quarterly Parish Forum meetings, is piloting two area committees¹⁶, has introduced public speaking at Planning Committee and has run a number of public meetings on various local issues, including the recent merger of the PCT. The Council has also undertaken consultations in Belbroughton, Alvechurch and Stoke Prior on the suitability of potential sites that have been identified for affordable housing and has recently established a Private Landlords Forum. While at an early stage, the two pilot area committees are designed to enable Members from all three tiers to champion the needs of their particular communities through the development of neighbourhood plans and prioritising issues for officers.

- 2.11 In order to deliver the Council's ambitions, Cabinet and senior officers have demonstrated their willingness to tackle difficult problems and take tough decisions. Examples include: a Council wide restructure, which resulted in a number of redundancies and most of the then management team leaving. Car parking charges were increased through the 2006/07-2008/09 budget, charges were levied on the previously free passes and charging for disabled parking introduced in the light of the new shopmobility service provision. In addition, the Council has removed the historical concurrent function payment provision to parish councils and suspended the green waste collection this winter. Through the Medium Term Financial Plan¹⁷, the Council will stop funding for the Woodrush and Haybridge sports centres in 2007/08.
- 2.12 These tough decisions are now taken within a clear strategic framework provided by the Council Objectives and priorities and a three year Medium Term Financial Plan. For the 2007-10 budget, all budget bids and savings have been ranked as unavoidable, high, medium or low, based on their contribution to the Council's strategic agenda and the aim to limit Council Tax to a maximum increase of 4.99%.
- 2.13 The Communications Strategy¹⁸ 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 area committees and understanding through a programme of "back to the floor"¹⁹ days for every member of the CMT.

3. Prioritisation

- 3.1 The Council now has a set of priorities and the basic processes in place to convert these into service improvements. It accepts that these processes are new and therefore not yet embedded. Areas for development include: strengthening the link between the Council Plan and future budget cycles; increasing the involvement of all sections of our communities in the design and delivery of services and improving the clarity of our partners roles within the Council Plan and other key strategies.
- 3.2 The Council's Vision and its Objectives have been translated into ten priorities for the period 2007/2010¹. These are based on an understanding of what matters most to our local communities. The priorities also reflect some issues that the Council knows are important, these include the regeneration of Longbridge and an excellent planning function, which will be critical to delivering priorities like the town centre and Longbridge. The Council understands that a performance management framework with a golden thread is critical for delivering these priorities (see section 5).
- 3.3 The Improvement Director has identified that the performance framework does need to be better integrated with the financial framework and an outline timetable for the 2007/08 has been agreed by Cabinet²; nevertheless, the Council is working on integrating its approach to setting priorities and allocating resources. The agreement of the Council's strategic agenda started the 2007/08 financial/performance cycle and was followed by the development of draft service business plans including growth bids and savings with the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy being considered at December Cabinet. The priorities have been agreed for the next three years and the Council's resources will be more closely aligned to its priorities over the medium term.
- 3.4 Because the Council has only recently defined its strategic agenda and is still working on articulating this through a Council Plan 2007/2010, the linkages between the various aims and objectives to deliver a cross cutting programme will require further

refinement through each performance cycle. The Council has begun work on this by using the balanced scorecard to identify how its financial management, process management and human resource management contribute to the Council's front line service priorities.

- 3.5 The Council's Objectives have been defined in broad terms³ 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 are a priority, so for example, under Council Objective Three: A Sense of Community and Well Being, the Council has made Community Influence a priority (in line with the recent Government White Paper), but has not made the Choosing Health agenda a priority, instead setting a local priority around community events, which is an aspect of the community cohesion agenda. Similarly, the Council has not made community safety a Council priority due to the reductions in crime within the District, but the Council remains a key partner in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. Under environment, the Council has made a clean district a priority and an improved planning service, but not recycling (which is already performing well) or carbon emissions (the Council is undertaking some work on this, but through external funding rather than the use of its own resources⁴).
- 3.6 The identification of the ten Council priorities and the development of targets and milestones in support of these means the Council is clear about what is important. The review of the medium term financial plan has clearly defined that all additional requests for funding have to demonstrate where the resource will achieve the delivery of the Council's objectives and priorities. The services that do not focus on the Council's priorities will have resources realigned to those of priority need. In addition, officers have investigated alternative methods of service delivery e.g. collaborative or shared working practices to enable the release of financial resource to other services in the delivery of our objectives. Budget savings in excess of £1.0m have been identified through this approach for 2007/08⁵. The Council already has a one year Improvement Plan. The Improvement Plan contains 21 actions supported by measures of success, detailed actions and resourcing (the Council released £350,000 from its reserves⁶ to help finance the Plan). The Council accepts that the Improvement Plan is ambitious and some re-programming has been required, nevertheless the Improvement Plan is on target. The Council Plan will include a set of key deliverables for each priority, with outcome measures and milestone measures and is due to be approved at February's Cabinet.
- 3.7 The Council now has a solid track record of delivery against SMART action plans. The Council delivered its previous Recovery Plan⁷, which was largely focused on the Resources Directorate and now has an Improvement Plan which clearly states the lead responsibilities, resource requirements, milestones and targets. This Improvement Plan was agreed by Cabinet and the Government Monitoring Board and is reported on monthly at CMT, PMB and Cabinet. The Council Plan will include a set of SMART key deliverables, while service business plans contain team actions plans. For large projects the Council has a project management methodology⁸.
- 3.8 The Council would accept that it needs to improve how the needs of all sections of our community are taken into account in the design, delivery and evaluation of services. It has recently commissioned a customer service peer review, has a Customer First Strategy⁹ (which includes plans to Charter Mark services), is introducing customer standards through the 2007/08 service business planning, has an Equalities Forum (and a Disabled Involvement Group) and plans to develop a youth forum and older people's forum in 2007/08. It also has funding to appoint a disabled outreach worker, introduced assisted collections for refuse collection and recycling, appointed an

Equalities Officer, which has led to developments like a translation service, clearer information for non-English speaking residents and partially sighted residents when they receive letters and a welfare officer in the Benefits Team who is working on the County Council's 3rd Age Project, to visit the elderly in their homes and to provide a co-ordinated service across a number of agencies.

- 3.9 The Council can demonstrate a link between its priorities and published statutory and other plans. Examples include the Spatial project¹⁰, Customer First Strategy¹¹, Streetscene Strategy¹², Communications Strategy¹³, People Strategy¹⁴, Inclusive Equalities Scheme¹⁵, Capital Strategy¹⁶, Value for Money Strategy¹⁷, Management Development Strategy¹⁸, Modern Manager Framework¹⁹, Medium Term Financial Strategy²⁰ and Housing Strategy²¹; however, with the Council's strategic framework being only recently agreed this alignment is partial and further work will be required as and when strategies are refreshed. In addition, the Council accepts that it needs to improve and clarify the roles of its partners within the various plans. The re-launch of the Community Plan will be key to this. The Council's Improvement Plan contains an agreed action to feedback on the changes to its priorities once agreed through the Council Plan.
- 3.10 The Council has made extensive use of learning from other organisations in the development of its strategic agenda. 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). 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 substantial 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.
- 3.11 The Council is working towards Level 3 of the local government equalities standard. In support of this the Council has developed and published an Inclusive Equalities Scheme²² and an easy read version of the Disability Equality Scheme²³. A framework has been developed to ensure that impact assessments are being undertaken by each department and that individual support is being provided where necessary. In order to consolidate the work done around the Standard the Council is now incorporating this into the business planning process. This now needs to be clearly focused on the operational areas thereby progressing the commitment from principle to outcome. The general commitment to equality is now evident and the Council presents a broad understanding of the Equalities Standards; however, there is a need for the Council to ensure that this commitment is integrated consistently across each service area. The Council has made significant progress in the development of an effective consultation framework and this directly supports our work around equality and diversity. The critical issue is the inter-relationship between the Inclusive Equalities Scheme and service delivery. By maintaining this approach through the medium term the Council is confident that it will better reflect the diverse needs of its community. The Council has

also recently been successful in receiving a £95,000 Capacity Building Fund grant for equalities work²⁴.

4. Capacity

- 4.1 The Council has come a long way from a low base in the last nine months, with the change in political and officer leadership being the catalyst for sustained action. Many issues have been addressed and firm plans are in place to implement numerous changes in practice; the timing is such that it is not possible to demonstrate the effectiveness of these, but what can be shown is that issues have indeed been systematically tackled and best practice, recognising the size of Bromsgrove, adopted. Areas of focus during 2007 onwards include embedding risk management, value for money; and delivering Single Status.
- 4.2 Working arrangements between political groups and external partners have improved significantly and the role of the Cabinet and officers is understood and has been enhanced by the creation of the Council's Performance Management Board, chaired by the Leader of the Opposition, which scrutinises performance. Generally internal working relationships are good, but the level of trust by Members of officer advice has yet to reach the desired standard. This is understandable and reflects many years of poor political and managerial leadership.
- 4.3 There is a clear commitment to lifting the Council's performance and reputation; however the scope and pace of change is now recognised as needing to be more realistic given the resources available and the breadth of the change agenda. 2006/7 has been and will continue to be a year of significant change and it is recognised that while further changes will occur in 2007/8 a period of stability is needed to embed the new practices, procedures and teams recently created. The PDR process will identify training needs and a prioritised approach to meeting these is planned. The Council has recently reviewed the way the Council's CMT operates¹ and the agenda that it addresses so as to enhance its contribution. The Council has made a start on risk management², but recognises that this needs development as does its approach to VFM. The Council's current VFM profile is mixed³ with the Council being relatively low spending when compared to its family group. The Culture and Communities Department has a high proportional spend in comparison and is an area that is under review for alternative ways of service delivery to provide better value for money. The Council recently agreed a VFM Strategy⁴ including an approach to scoring each service's VFM and developing agreed actions through the service business planning process⁵. In the short term it has been support services that have received the most attention and investment, ensuring that the financial; human and ICT resources and practices are upgraded to support service delivery of the Council as a whole. As the numerous changes made to recover the poor practices that were evident in Bromsgrove for far too long become engrained it will be possible to direct more attention, management capacity and investment to supporting and enhancing front line service delivery.
- 4.4 Despite the recognition of the need to achieve a period of stability, the Council is mindful that Single Status may have an adverse affect upon the need to achieve such stability, but remains committed to the national agenda in respect of the implementation of Single Status and the associated pay reviews. Work towards the implementation of Single Status has begun in earnest with a pilot job evaluation exercise having taken place during Autumn 2006, with the main evaluation due to commence in February 2007.

- 4.5 The Council recognises that a healthy industrial relations climate is important to the delivery of the Council's services. The Acting Chief Executive, Corporate Director Services and Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development meet with union representatives each month. The Council recognises that union membership is relatively low and uses other communication channels like staff forums to communicate directly to staff. The Council is continually working to improve health and safety and has recently set up a Health and Safety Committee. The Council has a positive relationship with the local Health and Safety Inspector and recently completed its first Council wide health and safety audit⁶.
- 4.6 The Council has gone through a steep learning curve, employed external help and has recently (November 2006) refocused the content, format and frequency of its performance reporting arrangements so that they are fit for purpose recognising the size, capacity and resources available. The arrangements for the future will undoubtedly enhance the Council's ability to improve service delivery. While service performance in the form of performance indicators has been subject to regular reporting and scrutiny, integration of service data, financial data and key actions was only implemented from December 2006. This factor and the business planning and performance management process now adopted and formally approved by the Cabinet in December 2006⁷ will enhance the capacity of the Council to focus upon and achieve continuous service improvement. This will further clarify the respective roles of Members and officers and enhance officer accountability through the PDR process to apply from February 2007
- 4.7 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, which is reviewed at CMT meetings weekly. Each Cabinet report is asked to identify the impact on the Council's priorities and a range of other factors e.g. customer first, equalities, financial, legal and human resource implications. Report authors have to complete a checklist of consultations undertaken with other officers and portfolio holders on the contents. Cabinet Members also take responsibility for presenting reports relevant to their portfolio at Cabinet meetings. Performance in meeting Forward Plan targets is monitored as a local indicator.
- 4.8 The Council recognises its duty to demonstrate openness and transparency in its decision making processes. The Standards Committee and Monitoring Officer have developed overview and scrutiny procedures designed to promote high ethical standards, but the Council accepts this is still an area of development. In order to raise the overview and scrutiny profile the Member Bulletin, scheduled for release on 31 January 2007, will contain a section dedicated to Scrutiny. Whilst recognising the importance and need to uphold high ethical standards the Council recognises the challenges faced by all local authorities in managing the overview and scrutiny process. In order to address this the Council is working with the I&DeA, utilising the ethical governance toolkit.
- 4.9 The Council clearly recognises the value of people and has a People Strategy⁹, health and safety procedures and effective industrial relations. The Council has retained Investors and People Status, but has an action plan¹⁰ to ensure it meets all the standards when it goes forward for re-accreditation in July 2007. The Council has also introduced a significant range of human resource techniques to improve capacity within its workforce. These include PDRs, a skills audit through the modern manager framework¹¹, a middle manager training programme and Top Team Programme. The Council accepts it has some way to go to ensure that it delivers a modern and consistent approach to people management.

- 4.10 The Council is continuing to make considerable use of external suppliers and expertise to deliver its priorities. Examples include: business process re-engineering for the spatial business project, the use of consultants on business planning and the development of the risk management strategy¹². The Council has introduced a new capability procedure¹³ and new Sickness Absence Policy¹⁴ to enable swifter action to be taken. 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 community¹⁵. The Council has introduced new recruitment advertising to improve these statistics. The Council is currently undergoing Single Status; as a result the Council has re-programmed the approach to workforce planning to 2007/08.
- 4.11 The capacity of the Council's key post-holders, both Members and officers has improved in the last 14 months. The Council has a new CMT and an experienced Improvement Director¹⁶ to offer strategic guidance and mentoring to the Acting Chief Executive. All Cabinet Members (and CMT) have been through the Top Team Development programme. 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. In doing so the Council recognises the need for further revisions and this work is in progress. The Council has reviewed a report¹⁹ from the Improvement Director on the Corporate Management Team and whether current capacity is sufficient and changes may need to be made during 2007/08.
- 4.12 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. 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.
- 4.13 The Council is improving its project management processes. The Council has a Corporate Improvement Plan, a Project Management Methodology, Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan²⁰. There is a new post in the Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance Team which will provide additional impetus to project management once recruited.
- 4.14 The Council employs a procurement manager in partnership with Worcester City Council. The procurement manager has revised the Council's contract procedures and supported the revisions to the financial regulations. In addition to the Gershon efficiencies, a savings target for procurement has been set and is regularly monitored by the Performance Management Board²¹. These savings have been generated by the renegotiations of contracts and by utilising alternative methods of purchase.
- 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 have not always been as either party would like; however, the LSP has recently invited the BDHT Chief Executive to sit on the LSP Board and is now working hard with the Trust through the Affordable Housing Project Team, to deliver on the joint priority of affordable housing. In 2005, the Council opened its Customer Service Centre (the Hub) in partnership with the County Council. More recently the Council did reject the shared services business case for the benefits service, but on the grounds that the business case was not robust. 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) is developing a proposed new Floating Support and Preventative Service for clients over 25 (younger people are catered for through the Baseline Service).

- 4.16 The Council has signed up to the Worcestershire Compact agreement between the Council and the voluntary sector and has produced a local and more user friendly version²² in agreement with the Bromsgrove and Redditch Network, the umbrella organisation for the voluntary organisations within the District. Through work on the Stepping Stones project the Council knows that there are over 140 voluntary organisations within the District. The Council would accept that it needs to tap in to this resource more and improve the capacity of the voluntary sector within the framework of the Community Strategy. The Council is currently working on an action plan to support the Compact and has received positive feedback from the County Council on this work.
- 4.17 The Council is working on a strategic and integrated approach to diversity through its Inclusive Equalities Scheme. The Equality and Diversity Forum is now chaired by a community member in order to ensure that the community leads the work programme. Recent recruitment campaigns for the Forum have ensured that it now represents all sections of the community. The Council has provided comprehensive training to all Members on equalities, introduced Equalities Champions in each department and developed a formal process for completing and monitoring equalities impact assessments.

5. Performance Management

- 5.1 All the main constituent elements are now in place for a basic performance management framework: a community plan, council plan, service business plans, team plans and PDRs; and an integrated cycle of financial and performance reporting through middle management, senior management, Executive Members and Non-Executive Members. The Council accepts the performance management framework will not be embedded at this stage (for example, both the Council Plan and Community Plan are currently being written). Future areas of focus include; reducing the number of indicators reported corporately, stronger challenge of targets at both officer and Member level, improving the performance management of the LSP Board (in particular outcome targets and links to the County wide LAA) and strengthening the links between performance management, procurement and customer service.
- 5.2 The key development during the last 12 months has been the regular reporting of performance information to managers and Members¹. This development has included more user friendly information, a reduction in the number of indicators from 250 to 116, which are a mixture of BVPIs and local indicators (a further reduction to 50 is planned for corporate reporting to enable better review and scrutiny); and the development of a formal reporting timetable². This timetable also applies to the Improvement Plan.
- 5.3 The Council has not had a great deal of capacity to support the development of performance management in its partner organisations, because it has had to concentrate on putting its own house in order first. Nevertheless, the Council, through the LSP Board has identified four priorities for partners operating in the District and has started to report progress against key projects and key indicators to the LSP Board. This is not as well developed as the Council would like and the Council, with the support of the Government Monitoring Board has made a bid to the Intervention Fund³ to support the development of a re-freshed Community Plan, with better links to the

LAA and better interfaces with the project groups and theme groups through improved performance management. The Council also received a nil star housing rating⁴ earlier in 2006 and this identified the need to obtain and report information on the performance of our partner, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust, which has been reported to CMT and the Performance Management Board.

- 5.4 Following a review of the Committee Structure in early 2006 the Council established an overarching Scrutiny Steering Board, an Audit Board and the Performance Management Board. The Audit Board is chaired by the leader of an opposition group and has a focus on the work of internal audit, external audit and inspection. The Scrutiny Steering Board is currently chaired by a Member of the controlling group and oversees a range of task and finish groups who scrutinise specific issues through an agreed work plan. The Council does, however, in common with many authorities recognise the need for an improved understanding of the role of scrutiny by the Cabinet, Members and officers. Raising the profile of Scrutiny within the Council and the community is essential and to facilitate this the Council has instigated a planned programme of training for officers and Members. The Council is also taking advice from other councils who have achieved an excellent rating in order to develop best practice. The Performance Management Board had its first meeting in November 2005 and is now chaired by the Leader of the Opposition. The Performance Management Board receives the Improvement Plan Exception Report each month and performance indicators each quarter (monthly from January 2007). It also receives a range of other reports to an agreed work plan e.g. Annual Report of the LSP Board. There have been significant improvements to performance in a number of areas this year including: benefits, planning, the Hub and street scene services.
- 5.5 Performance management is integrated with the management of resources primarily through the development of the medium term financial plan. The identified priorities of the Council reflects performance management issues e.g. clean district and planning, specifically, but also customer service and a separate key deliverable on performance, concerned with moving the Council's overall basket of indicators to above the median (unless there is an agreed reason for not doing so). Heads of Service are asked to link their service business plans to the Council Plan's priorities and key deliverables and identify growth bids and savings in relation to these, which are fed into the medium term financial plan. These bids and savings are evaluated and ranked in terms of their contribution to the Council's priorities and are reported to Cabinet.
- 5.6 Currently there is not a well publicised and user friendly method for service users to submit complaints. There is a customer feedback⁵ form on the Council's updated Internet site and there is an Internet "ask a question"⁶, which goes directly to the Council's Customer First Officer, a new post created this year. The Council has recognised this issue and is purchasing a new electronic customer feedback system⁷, subject to capital budget approval (this action is part of the Improvement Plan). The public can make representations to the Council in a number of ways, through the Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings, through the LSP Stakeholder event (the Council held its first one recently and intend to do so every 6 months from now on). The Council has also recently established two "area committee" pilots⁸, which will enable the ward councillors (district, county and parish) to make representations to the Council on local issues and also develop a neighbourhood plan to be submitted to the LSP Board.
- 5.7 The Council is very keen to develop a strong user focus. Customer First is one of our four values and Customer Service one of our corporate priorities. The Hub receives over 6,000 calls per month, with a 86% resolution at first point of contact (November 2006)⁹. The Council accepts that further improvement is required; however

developments during 2006 have included: resource level agreements with back office functions, the transfer of the Highways Partnership Unit enquiries and the transfer of the corporate switchboard. 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. The Council has also invested in the Council House "front of house", improving the design and layout for our customers, generating savings through more efficient ways of working (cross working, full compliance with the BFI post opening regulations and a corporate post opening process)

- 5.8 The Council has introduced a range of initiatives to improve customer focus within the organisation including a "back to the floor" programme for all members of CMT and the purchase of a customer feedback system. The Council has established a Customer Panel, which has included focus groups on the 2006/07 and 2007/08 budget and is currently developing customer standards through focus groups that will be surveyed through the Panel shortly (the Council's 2007/08 business plan template also includes a section on Customer First, which asks each service to identify their customer standards). The Council has established an Equalities Forum and intends to establish a youth council and older people's forum in 2007 once our Communications and Customer First Manager is in post and our management capacity to deliver this has increased. The Council administers a Parish Forum, attended by the Leader and senior officers, which meets quarterly. Internally, the Council has an annual employee survey for staff, a staff champions group, regular staff forums and a Union Liaison Meeting. The Council has made progress in this area, but recognises that these arrangements need improving and embedding. Key areas of development include the relationship between the Hub and "back office" functions, telephony and staff training on letter writing and dealing with the public that moves the Council away from a regulatory culture to a more empathic customer first culture.
- 5.9 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 and a robust strategic housing action plan¹⁰ in response to the nil star inspection.
- 5.10 In order to encourage a performance culture across the Council, Core Brief reports every month to staff on our performance figures and the Improvement Plan¹¹, the Acting Chief Executive, writes the lead article in the staff magazine "Connect"¹² which updates staff on key developments, the Assistant Chief Executive writes a regular column "performance matters". The Council has also established a Performance Plus User Group, which meets monthly to develop the reporting of performance information, has introduced a staff suggestion scheme "Bright Ideas"¹³, 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. The Council has badged all our work on transforming the Council, under the banner "Building Pride".
- 5.11 The Council now produces an integrated performance and financial report that cross references performance in both areas, this highlighted that while the number of people visiting the Dolphin Centre was increasing, and the income target was not being achieved. The new performance reporting format, requires each department to estimate their outturn performance each month, based on the latest monthly figures.

An analysis of targets and predicted outturns below the median has been reported to CMT and as the focus on hitting targets has increased a number of targets have been re-set to be more realistic e.g. abandoned vehicles, recoverable housing benefit¹⁴. This is a developing process and the Council would accept that the process of target setting needs to be further enhanced through each future business planning cycle. All targets for 2007-10 will be reviewed by the Acting Chief Executive, Improvement Director and Assistant Chief Executive and scrutinised by the Performance Management Board before the start of the new financial year and performance certificates (which require heads of service to sign off their outturn figures and targets) completed for all BVPIs and local indicators in the corporate basket of 50 indicators.

- 5.12 Cross departmental working is reasonably well co-ordinated within the Council. The Council's Strategic Management Team meets every Monday morning with the Leader of the Council to provide a regular and systematic way of co-ordinating activities. Similarly, the CMT meets every Tuesday. Member of CMT sit on a range of groups that support cross departmental working. These include the Town Centre Strategy Group, the Longbridge Working Party, regular meetings with planning officers, housing officers and BDHT on affordable housing, a Performance Plus User Group, Spatial Project Steering Group, four LSP Theme Groups, including CDRP and CDRP tasking group. The Council intends to develop this approach to create cross departmental working at middle management level. The Council also makes use of management practices like resource level agreements between the Hub and "back office" to improve service delivery and a Support Service Schedule in each business plan to ensure the impact on support services of front line service key deliverables is understood and planned for.
- 5.13 The Council has anecdotal information about the level of satisfaction in its communities through forums like PACT etc.; however, the Council does not have good quantitative information on the levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in different sections of the community. To address this issue, the Council is in the process of purchasing an electronic complaints system which will enable this kind of analysis. Similarly, the Customer Panel contract will mean that we will be able to obtain statistically valid customer satisfaction data on each ward during 2008.
- 5.14 The Council has undertaken some benchmarking work around the Hub, the Planning Team and Performance Plus. The VFM Strategy has identified the need to make greater use of evaluation and comparison techniques to increase our self-awareness and efficiency. Key to this will be the VFM template included in our 2007/08 business plans.
- 5.15 The Council produced a Best Value Performance Plan, called Council Results 2005/06¹⁵, which was a significant improvement on previous years in its style and content. The document clearly details the Council's poor performance during 2005/06 and was published on the Internet. The Council also published information as part of the Council Tax leaflet¹⁶ on our performance. The Council would accept that this is an area for development. The Improvement Plan includes funding for 2 extra "Council Chats", the residents magazine, one of which will be an Annual Report, based on the Wychavon model. The Council has recently produced a draft Annual Report for the LSP¹⁷, which will be published before the end of the financial year and will be holding two "town hall" meetings a year, one as part of the budget preparations and one reporting our outturn. Also, the Council's Internet site includes the quarterly performance reports, which go to Cabinet.

6. Achievement and Improvement

- 6.1 The Council's achievements and impact on its communities needs to be set within the context that the Council has had to invest heavily in the immediate past, both in terms of time and money to rebuild the Council so that it is fit for purpose. The Council's overall performance is now improving, but from a very low base. 2007/08 should see the Council's basket of indicators move up to a level comparable with other Fair and possibly Good authorities. It will be important that the Council sustains this momentum through the changes it has made to its performance management arrangements, but also tackles some of the more complex improvement issues like: outcomes (including improved linkage to the Community Plan and the County wide LAA), customer experience, project management of long term outcomes like the town centre and Longbridge regenerations, a more strategic approach to addressing the needs of the vulnerable in our communities and improving the Council's reputation.
- 6.2 The Improvement Plan and Council Plan contain actions in relation to most of the areas for improvement, but some updating will be required as a result of the CPA. The Council Plan contains four Council Objectives. Achievements and improvements against each of these are set out below, with additional sections on the Council's contribution to the County wide LAA and a section on how the Council is addressing the needs of the vulnerable in our communities.

Council Objective – Improvement (Priorities: Performance, Reputation and Customer Service)

- 6.3 Overall performance for 2005/06 showed that 79% of comparable BVPI indicators were bottom and third quartile¹. The estimated outturn for 2006/07 suggests this figure will fall to 54%². The first quarter 2006/07 performance was still poor, so the predicted outturn position for 2006/07 is lower than the actual current performance. Currently, 82% of the Council's indicators are on target³ (or within 10% of target) and 72% are improving⁴. The Council has also maintained a strong focus on its improvement activities, with 79% of the actions in the Improvement Plan currently on target or less than one month behind⁵. Despite the low base, the Council can demonstrate it is achieving high quality services in some areas and some of its priorities. The Council has invested in its recycling and composting services and is achieving second quartile and top quartile performance (2005/06 outturn) for its recycling and composting respectively. Very recently the Council has been identified nationally as one of the top ten most improved councils nationwide for recycling⁶. The Council offers a green waste recycling collection which is unique to the County and commensurate with the top performing district in terms of the volume of waste recycled. The majority of residual waste that is collected is diverted to Combined Heat and Power plants reducing the amount of waste required for landfill.
- 6.4 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 during 2006/07, falling from 34.52 days (April 2006) to 25.91 days (November 2006)⁷ and 16.53 days (April 2006) and 8.25 days (November 2006)⁸ which is top and second quartile respectively. The Council is also now delivering most of the DWP performance standards.
- 6.5 The Council also has a good cultural offer, with an extensive range of community events like the free bonfire night, street theatre and bandstand programme. As at November 2006, 17,585⁹ people had attended such events this year. 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 currently underwrites the revenue of the Artrix to the value of £120,000 per annum.

- 6.6 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.
- 6.7 The Hub is now performing to an acceptable standard with the resolution of customer contacts at the first point of contact increasing from 78% (April 2006) to 86% (November 2006)¹⁰, the average speed of answering calls falling from 88 seconds (April 2006) to 25 seconds (November 2006)¹¹ and the total number of calls falling from 10,784 (April 2006) to 6,548 (November 2006)¹². The Council estimates that it is receiving approximately 1,000 customer complaints per annum and accepts that a customer culture across the whole of the Council remains a key area for improvement, in particular, customer standards and their monitoring and evaluation.
- 6.8 With a Poor rating and poor performing services the Council's reputation has suffered at a local, regional and national level. The Council's press coverage is improving and over 90%¹³ of the press coverage is now positive or neutral. Improving the Council's reputation is a key area of development through 2007.

Council Objective – Regeneration (Priorities: Town Centre, Longbridge and Housing)

- 6.9 The Council is taking a strategic rather than piecemeal 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.
- 6.10 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 Options¹⁴ consultation supporting the mixed development option, which aims to create 10,000 jobs.
- 6.11 The Housing Strategy¹⁵ has a target of 400 additional units over 5 years (80 a year). This target is being met (including the provision of rural housing), but is based on a housing need survey completed in spring 2005 (this included supplementary work on the needs of younger people and rural housing need). The Council is currently working other Worcestershire authorities on the South Housing Market Area assessment. This data will be used to inform and influence the Regional Housing Strategy and Regional Spatial Strategy to reflect needs and pressures in the district.
- 6.12 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.

Council Objective – Sense of Community and Well Being (Priorities: Community Influence and Community Events)

- 6.13 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 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. The Council has recently started to pilot two area committees. Achievements on community events are detailed in 6.5

Council Objective Environment (Priorities: Clean District and Planning)

- 6.14 The employment of additional street cleansing staff and investment in new plant has led to an improvement in the cleanliness of the District with the proportion of land suffering from unacceptable levels of detritus dropping from 26% (2005/06) to 17.86% (July 2006)¹⁸; however, the latest performance is still below the median for district councils. 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.
- 6.15 The Planning Service has seen an improvement in its performance with 91% of minor planning applications determined within 8 weeks (November 2006) which is top quartile, compared to 57% in 2005/06¹⁹. Similarly, the percentage of other planning applications processed within 8 weeks also top quartile based on current performance.

Contribution to County Wide LAA Targets

- 6.16 The Council accepts that its contribution to the County wide LAA targets is an area of development; nevertheless, the Council is contributing to the County wide targets. Achievements against the six County LAA objectives²⁰ are set out below.

A: Communities that are Safe and Feel Safe

- 6.17 The Council is helping to create communities that are safe. Burglary levels in the District have fallen from 759 in 2003/04 to a predicted outturn for 2006/07 of 348²¹. Similarly, violent crime has fallen from 1,160 in 2003/04 to a predicted outturn of 812²²; and vehicle crime has dropped from 1,260 to 1,088 over the same period²³. Fear of crime is still an issue, but a recent survey²⁴ suggests this is now reducing. The use of PACT meetings, neighbourhood wardens, diversionary activities, the expansion of CCTV, targeted operations like Operation Ocelot, aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour by boy racers in the towns car parks have all contributed to this.

B: A Better Environment – For Today and Tomorrow

- 6.18 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 activities²⁵. 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%²⁶.

- 6.19 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 will need to be released in the near future.

C: Economic Success that is Shared by All

- 6.20 The Council is a partner with Advantage West Midlands on the Bromsgrove Technology Park. Basepoint PLC has a building under construction, due to open in February 2007. 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.

D: Improving Health and Well Being.

- 6.21 Overall, the health of the District’s populous compares favourably with other districts which reflects the general affluence of the area, with no areas being in the 20% least deprived nationally. Improving health is not a Council priority and the Council intends to stop its funding of the Haybridge and Woodrush dual use sports centres in 2007/08, and is currently investigating the transfer of the Dolphin Centre to a charitable trust. The Council does provide a Lifeline System (performance indicators for response times and equipment installation are all above target) for vulnerable residents and has made a capital contribution of £1m to support the provision of Extra Care Housing with the Housing Corporation.

E: Meeting the Needs of Children and Young People

- 6.22 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 recently established a Children and Young People Board, which met for the first time in December 2006²⁸. The Council does provide a range of activities for children and young people including: street theatre, the bonfire night, diversionary activities e.g. the Majors Green Football Scheme, boxing, which is due to start in South Bromsgrove High School in mid-February, Sanders Park and St Chads skate parks and play areas. The Council also works with voluntary organisations, for example, re-planting Chesnut 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.

F: Stronger Communities

- 6.23 The Council recognises the importance of building stronger communities. The self assessment has already demonstrated the Council’s commitment to affordable housing, improving opportunities for recreation and empowering communities. The Council accepts the need to strengthen the link between its local priority on affordable housing and the year two County wide LAA target. The Council has provided Affordable Warmth Training for all staff; signed up to the Worcestershire Compact with the voluntary sector and launched its own shorter, more reader friendly Compact, within this framework. The Council understands that it needs to improve the access to

its services and has recently introduced a translation service in all its main reception points. The Council's main contribution to income deprivation is its benefits service (anti-poverty strategy, benefits take up, improved performance), but has also signed up to the County wide initiative on a free bus pass for older people. With regard to improving the quality of life in our most disadvantaged areas, the LSP Board has recently agreed to explore the physical regeneration of an area Charford²⁹; while the planned regeneration of the town centre should benefit some of the more deprived communities who do not have the income or transport to commute to other shopping centres. The Council has modernised its domestic violence refuge and is closing its poor hostels for the homeless.

Meeting the Needs of the Vulnerable Within Our Communities

- 6.24 The Council recognises that services must be delivered to all its communities and that the needs of all minority groups are considered and acted upon. For the last two years the Council, in partnership with the Black Community celebrated Black History Month. Other community projects 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.
- 6.25 The Council has established processes to ensure the reduction of crime in the most vulnerable areas within our District and the Council provides a Lifeline Service to vulnerable elderly residents. In addition 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. The Council has developed a Hate Crime Procedure³¹ covering all six equality strands including race. The Equality and Diversity Forum has recently been expanded to nearly 40 members who have signed up to being involved in a 12-18 month programme of work to implement the Inclusive Equalities Scheme. The Council launched a shopmobility service in 2005, which now has over 140 users.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 This self assessment demonstrates that the Council has, particularly in the last 9 months, put in place the basic infrastructure required to deliver excellent services and outcomes for our communities - this is the key challenge for the coming years. In doing so the Council is aware that:-
- a). The District is essentially an affluent one and the societal problems it faces are ones of affluence. For example, affordable housing, the difficulty in identifying and supporting the small numbers of vulnerable people within our communities, regenerating the town centre, in particular, encouraging people to shop locally and not commute to other shopping centres in the region, counter acting the increasing social isolation within our communities and creating a greater social cohesion and sense of community. These are long term problems requiring a focus on outcomes.
 - b). In the shorter term, the Council needs to continue to address its own performance on a range of process and output indicators, for example, processing planning applications, the payment of benefits, domestic waste collection and the Hub; however, the Council needs to address some of the more intangible aspects of these services through an improved customer

experience, for example, the quality of face to face contact and the tone of letters.

- c). While the Council has improved its financial management and stabilised its budgetary position; in order to be able to deliver the above agenda, particularly, the longer term outcomes for its residents, the Council needs to develop capacity through a combination of working with its 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 improved Member and officer skills.
- d). Tackling all of the above is dependent on stable and sustainable political leadership. The forthcoming local elections will see a change in political membership and the Council will need to take steps to ensure the solid progress on improved Member/Member and Member/officer relations are maintained.

Self Assessment Score by Council

Theme	Self Assessed Score
Ambition	1
Prioritisation	1
Capacity	2
Performance Management	1
Achievement and Improvement	1

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