

Inspection report

January 2004

Comprehensive performance assessment

Hart District Council

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Introduction

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

Summary of Comprehensive Performance Assessment judgements

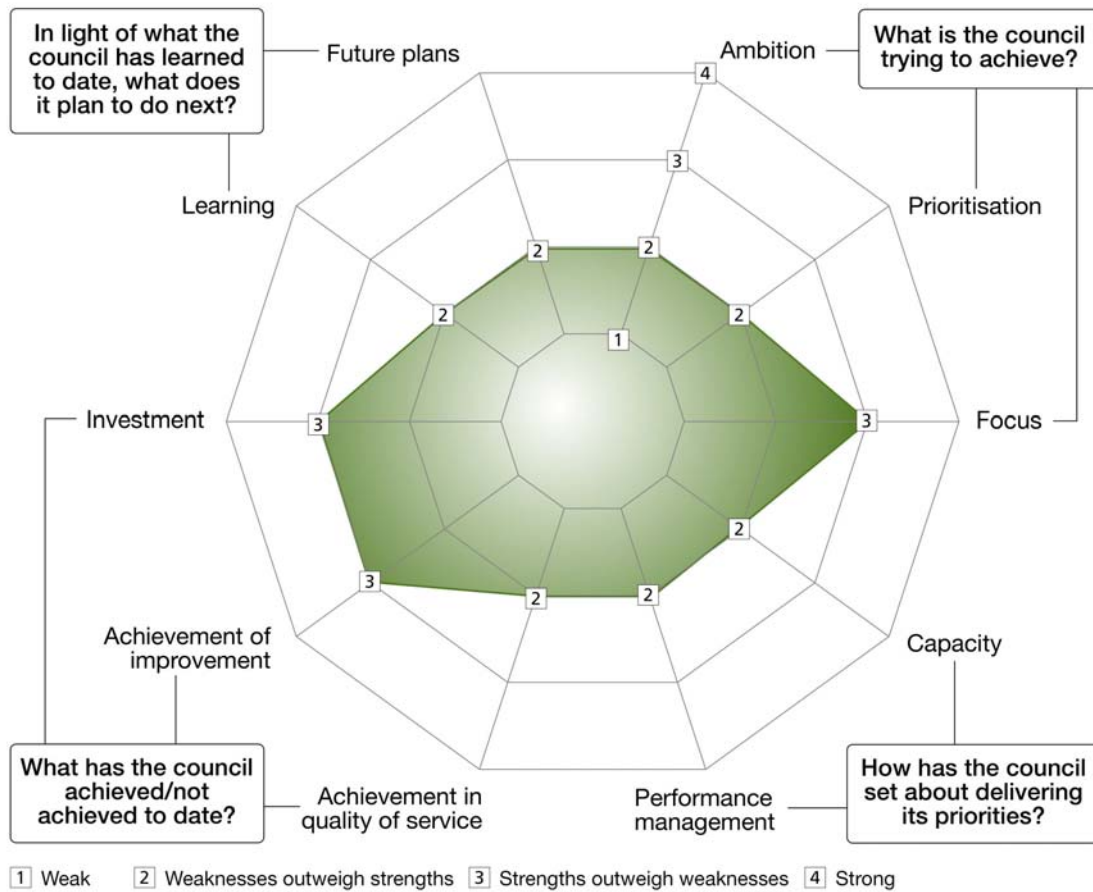
- 4 Hart is a fair council. It is currently going through a major period of transition, following the appointment of a new chief executive in August 2002 and more recently the selection of a new leader by the conservative administration. The outcome of the change process will have a major bearing on whether or not the council is able to improve its community leadership and service delivery.
- 5 The quality of the services provided by the council is mixed. Environmental health, community safety, recycling and leisure services are good. External assessments of housing, planning and of revenues and benefits, rate these services as fair. The refuse collection service is poor.
- 6 The new political and managerial leadership have recognised that the long-standing weaknesses in performance management and corporate capacity have resulted in the delivery of inconsistent services to local people. The new leadership is actively seeking to address these weaknesses through an ambitious programme of organisational change, including a restructuring of senior management team, and by investing heavily to improve corporate systems and processes. While these are all promising developments it is too early to assess their impact on the local community.
- 7 The lack of a clear strategic approach to exploring alternative ways of delivering services, a failure to maximise external learning and to exploit fully opportunities to enhance capacity through joint working and partnership, all impact on the potential for service improvement in the future.
- 8 The council faces considerable challenges. It is succeeding in its commitment to low council tax but is facing growing budget pressure. If it is to avoid reductions in important services in future, it urgently needs to set clear priorities and non-priorities, with specific targets and outcomes to measure achievement of its corporate objectives, and to prioritise its resources accordingly.
- 9 In parallel with setting clearer priorities, strengthening performance management and improving its responsiveness to local priorities, the council needs to improve its future planning. Otherwise it will not be well placed to achieve its ambitions.
- 10 The new political leadership and chief executive are providing clearer direction to the council's activities. Both internally and externally people are now clearer about its overarching aims, particularly with regard to pegging council tax rises to inflation. However, this is weakened by the lack of a clearly articulated long-term vision for the district, translated into clear customer-focused outcomes.
- 11 The council is improving services in line with its corporate ambitions, particularly in relation to 'protecting the environment and improving the built environment' and 'a place to live'. It is responding positively to the local priority for affordable homes and over the past two years, during the construction of a major new high quality residential development at Elvetham Heath, has significantly increased the number of new affordable homes provided.

Summary of assessment scores

Top level question	Theme	Grade	Weighted score
What is the council trying to achieve?	Ambition	2	2
	Prioritisation	2	2
	Focus	3	3
How has the council set about delivering its priorities?	Capacity	2	2
	Performance management	2	2
What has the council achieved/not achieved to date?	Achievement in quality of service	2	6
	Achievement of improvement	3	9
	Investment	3	6
In light of what the council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	Learning	2	2
	Future plans	2	2
Weighted score			36
Corporate assessment category			Fair

Diagram illustrating the themes and scores for Hart District Council

Hart District Council



Recommendations

12 It is recommended that the council:

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

Context

The locality

- 13 The district, which covers 21,500 hectares, is situated in the north-east corner of Hampshire, adjoining Surrey, Wokingham and Bracknell Forest. Hart is an attractive place to live with a high quality natural and built environment. The M3 and main Southampton to London rail line run through the district providing excellent communication links to London and the rest of the country.
- 14 The population of the district was 83,505 in 2001. Just over half the population (48,685) live in the main centres of Fleet, Yateley, Hook and Hartley Wintney, with the rest living in small communities spread widely across the district. Ninety per cent of the area is open countryside.
- 15 The population, which has grown comparatively slowly in the past ten years, is projected to rise at a faster rate (13.3 per cent) than the regional average of 8.2 per cent up to 2010, which will increase pressure for new homes. The proportion of the population from groups other than 'white British' is 5.6 per cent. This compares to 8.7 per cent for the South East, and 13.0 per cent nationally (2001 Census).
- 16 Hart is an affluent area, ranked as least deprived council nationally based on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM's) indices of multiple deprivation. None of the district's population live in the most deprived 25 per cent areas of England.
- 17 Educational attainment is high and the number of people suffering long-term illness or poor health is among the lowest nationally. A very high proportion of people of working age are in employment (86.4 per cent). Over 60 per cent of these commute to work outside the district.
- 18 Unemployment in the district was 0.8 per cent in April 2003, below the south-east regional figure of 1.6 per cent and 2.6 per cent nationally. While earnings are 17 per cent higher than the regional average, average house prices are 26 per cent higher, making housing comparatively less affordable in Hart. Affordable housing is an important issue for the community.

The council

- 19 Following a long period of no overall control, the conservatives took political control of the council in May 2001. Following the elections of May 2002, the conservatives have 22 of the 35 seats, the liberal democrats hold 10, and the 3 remaining seats are held by independents. In May 2001, the council adopted a leader and executive model supported by a scrutiny committee. The conservative group appointed a new leader in May 2003.
- 20 The council is debt free. The net revenue budget for 2003/04 is £8.5 million (£22.6 million gross), together with £1.4 million in general fund reserves. The council has an interim two-year capital programme of £2.8 million in the period 2002/03 to 2003/04, in addition to which it has a further £9.5 million available capital resources currently unallocated. The council employs 470 people.

- 21 The council appointed a new chief executive in August 2002. Council services are organised into five separate business units. The heads of these units and the chief executive form the council's management team. The council is currently introducing a new senior management structure.
- 22 A peer review was undertaken by IDeA in June 2003. The peer review concluded that the council's key strengths included loyal and dedicated staff. That the council is engaged in an ambitious programme of change and has a clear focus on keeping Hart green and ensuring council tax increases do not exceed the rate of inflation. It identified a number of areas for improvement, including:
- ◆ developing a clearer long-term vision, that focuses on improving the quality of life of all its residents;
 - ◆ developing a corporate plan that sets out ambitions and priorities, focused through challenging targets and desired outcomes;
 - ◆ reviewing how resources can be better aligned to council priorities. Ensuring the council's approach is better understood by members, staff, residents and partners;
 - ◆ improving project, performance and risk management;
 - ◆ enhancing opportunities to learn from external good practice; and
 - ◆ improving communication.
- 23 The council had previously initiated a review of corporate effectiveness by Volanti Consulting in October 2002.
- 24 The council carried out, as requested, a scored self-assessment for this inspection against each of the corporate assessment themes. The self-assessment was informed by a peer review commissioned by the council and undertaken by IDeA in June 2003, referred to above. Using the Audit Commission's scoring mechanism the council has assessed itself as 'Good'.

What is the council trying to achieve?

Ambition

- 25 Weaknesses outweigh strengths on ambition.
- 26 The lack of a clearly articulated long-term vision for the district focused on improved outcomes for local people is a key weakness.
- 27 The corporate plan is weak. In particular, the themes contained in the corporate plan are not clearly expressed in terms of measurable outcomes for the community. Some of them, such as 'working in partnership' and 'a learning organisation', are more about the mechanisms for achieving objectives rather than the ambitions themselves. The six themes in the plan are:
- ◆ community leadership;
 - ◆ benefits must be greater than costs;
 - ◆ working in partnership;
 - ◆ protecting the environment/improving the built environment;
 - ◆ a place to live – sustainable towns and villages; and
 - ◆ a learning organisation.
- 28 While the corporate plan does not clearly articulate the ambition of the council, the council's ambitions do reflect the key issues facing the community. It is evident from the document review and discussions with stakeholders that those areas identified by MORI in the 2001 residents' survey, including protecting the local environment, affordable housing and improved public transport, steer what the council does. The council's ambitions place strong emphasis on these.
- 29 Partners have not been effectively engaged in helping the council to develop its ambitions. Partners are critical of the corporate plan. The council, in its self-assessment, recognises the need for review to clarify its long-term vision and ensure that the objectives help to improve the quality of life for local people.
- 30 A community plan providing future direction for the council has yet to be agreed. Initially the council played an active role in bringing partners together to form the local strategic partnership (LSP) and to agree with partners the five key themes for the community plan. This included the council taking the lead with other local groups in developing the 'environment' theme. However, following changes in the council's administration, for a brief period at the start of 2003 there was a lack of political engagement in the partnership, which undermined its standing with strategic partners and its ability to offer leadership to the community. The council quickly recognised the damage this had done, and in May 2003 it renewed its engagement with the LSP at councillor and senior management level. Since then, considerable progress has been made, and a draft community plan has been agreed for consultation with the community and partners.

- 31 The council is working effectively in partnership with local agencies in other areas of its work. For example, ambitions for community safety have been determined in partnership with 18 local agencies.
- 32 The new political and managerial leadership is starting to provide strategic direction to the council. The new political administration has clearly articulated its twin ambitions of providing good quality services, while maintaining a low level of council tax. The council recognises the challenge inherent in achieving both of these and has identified potential solutions such as streamlining processes and internal re-structuring.
- 33 Community leadership is still at an early stage, but already there is evidence of positive outcomes; for example, the council's successful leadership of the community to secure funding for a major flood relief programme in Fleet.
- 34 The council is contributing to strategies to build cohesive and sustainable communities. It is responding to local need by increasing the number of new affordable homes provided in the district, while protecting the environment by ensuring new communities such as Elvetham Heath are developed on a sustainable basis. Similarly, it is playing an active role in contributing to sub-regional planning, for example by working with nearby councils and other agencies to promote sustainable economic growth in the Blackwater Valley area.
- 35 The council has clearly communicated its aims to local people through 'Hart News', its newspaper which is delivered to every home in Hart. Staff, managers and partners consistently report that they understand the council's new direction. While the council is clearly communicating its aims it needs to develop its activities around community engagement.

Prioritisation

- 36 Weaknesses outweigh strengths for prioritisation.
- 37 The council is not making full use of its intelligence gathering mechanisms to inform its priorities for the area. For example, while 83 per cent of parish councils are well informed about what the council is doing, only 25 per cent feel consulted about its priorities. Other examples of where the council has not made full use of existing links to inform its priorities are the LSP. The council does have strong links with some partner agencies such as Age Concern, who feel that it understands the needs of older people, but this approach is not consistently replicated across the council. This limits the council's ability to fully understand the area's needs and to take account of different interests and perspectives in setting priorities.
- 38 The council does not have a systematic approach to community consultation. A range of approaches have been used in the past including a citizens' panel and MORI surveys, but these have not been used regularly or continuously. The citizens' panel was stopped. Some councillors engage with the local community in a variety of ways but this is not consistent and does not ensure the council corporately gathers the views, opinions and concerns of all sections of the community. This limits the council's ability to prioritise service improvements in line with community need. While Hart News is effective in imparting information from the council, it is less effective as the main consultation tool as it does not ensure a representative sample and the response rate to some issues is very poor – for example, 20 responses in a recent issue about the corporate plan.

- 39 At service level the council is responding to locally expressed priorities in some areas. For example, the community safety partnership has a clear understanding of the issues in the area through detailed crime audits and is directing resources towards them. The council is also encouraging local debate and comment on a major housing proposal at Queen Elizabeth II Barracks. However, these examples of consultation are not consistently applied across the council. The council recognises in its draft communication strategy that presently Hart's communications are 'unplanned, uncoordinated, under resourced and not effectively measured'.
- 40 The council has not clearly expressed its non-priority areas. This makes it difficult to prioritise budgetary decisions. Some decisions, for example to close public toilets, have been based on short-term financial savings rather than on the impact on service users. The decision was subsequently reversed in response to public concern. The council is at risk of reacting to crises and allocating restricted funds to areas which are not a priority for the council or the local community it serves.
- 41 The three-year medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) does not link expenditure to corporate priorities and therefore does not help to shift resources to corporate priorities. The indicative budget cuts for 2004/05 have been allocated on a pro-rata basis rather than through a clear assessment of relative priorities.
- 42 However, some priority areas have been identified and in the context of overall reductions in budgets, significant additional resources have been moved to planning and community transport. Another example of moving resources in line with priorities is the allocation of the capital receipt from the council's voluntary transfer of its housing stock to affordable housing.
- 43 There is good prioritisation of resources within some services. For example, the council's community safety section is effective at targeting resources in line with need in order to target areas where crime levels are higher.
- 44 The corporate plan contains some potentially conflicting priorities. For example, there is a target to reduce the number of new dwellings while intending to maximise affordable housing. It is also unclear how the emerging themes in the draft community plan, such as health and wellbeing, are reflected in the corporate plan. The council recognises the need for greater clarity, and to explain its priorities internally and externally so that all stakeholders share the same understanding. Work is already underway to review the corporate plan.

Focus

- 45 Strengths outweigh weaknesses on the council's ability to focus.
- 46 The council has sustained its focus over time on the key issues that matter most to local people. In relation to 'a place to live- sustainable towns and villages', the council has demonstrated its long-standing commitment to provide new affordable homes through substantial capital investment. There has been a significant increase in new affordable homes provided in the district in the last two years, and the council is currently focusing its efforts on how to increase the proportion of affordable housing secured through the planning process.

- 47 It maintains a strong focus on 'protecting the environment' – for example, through sustainability policies within the local plan, which require developers to include green transport plans for large developments, and through its conservation areas assessments. This helps to support the council's overall objectives and reflects an important aspiration of local people.
- 48 A range of effective mechanisms are in place to enable the council to sustain its focus on priority areas. A major sites sub-committee enables focused and well-informed decision making on new housing developments. This produces high quality development, which is recognised by national design awards.
- 49 The council's scrutiny committee is extremely effective in focusing on and delivering positive outcomes in terms of things that matter most to local people – for example, influencing Thames Water's programme to secure a £2.5 million flood relief scheme in Fleet. Its current work programme, which includes a review of youth provision, reflects this focus on local need.
- 50 Meetings of the council's executive demonstrate a clear focus on corporate objectives. Similarly, a clear focus by management on corporate objectives is supported by an effective range of internal meetings and briefings with executive councillors. These are important mechanisms for ensuring political and managerial decision making is focused in the right areas.
- 51 Hart has a long history of preparing corporate plans to provide strategic direction to the council. There are important weaknesses in the existing plan, which the council is addressing. Nevertheless, the corporate aims do reflect the issues facing the community, while placing significant emphasis on cost-efficiency. The MTFS provides clear focus on achieving the political objective of maintaining council tax increases at around 2.5 per cent.
- 52 The council has not focused on its relationship with partners. Although good examples can be found, there is little evidence of the council having a consistent focus on engaging with all stakeholders and partners. The council recognises this as a weakness and is reviewing partnership working arrangements to ensure these are focused on supporting corporate aims.
- 53 Some arrangements do not help the council to focus on its ambitions. Not all executive councillors' responsibilities are well aligned with its corporate objectives. This would strengthen performance management and focus.

How has the council set about delivering its priorities?

Capacity

- 54 Weaknesses outweigh strengths on capacity.
- 55 The council's ability to tackle cross-service priorities such as services for older people is weakened by the service-based management arrangements. The council is aware of weaknesses in its corporate capacity and has started to address these. The planned re-structuring of the senior management team, to ensure a more strategic cross-cutting approach to service delivery is intended to help this.
- 56 Management development is an area of weakness. The development of individual management capacity has in the past focused on specific courses rather than a range of development activities to ensure that technically skilled staff become competent managers of people. The new strategic approach to HR and developing training and development strategy is helping to address this, and a regular programme of management development has been implemented.
- 57 Staff morale remains patchy as a result of inconsistent communications, high workloads and uncertainty resulting from the organisational restructuring. This reduces their capacity to deliver services effectively.
- 58 Overall capacity is weakened further by the absence of an effective council-wide approach to project management. The council's track record in project management is patchy. Some services show effective management of new projects – for example, the elections system – but across the council, projects are not consistently well managed. The council's self-assessment recognises the need to improve project management and it has taken steps to address past problems with major IT projects by establishing a corporate working group to oversee this area of work. Further work is needed to provide effective corporate management of all projects.
- 59 The council lacks a clear strategic approach to exploring alternative ways of delivering services. Its overall approach to procurement is weak and inconsistent. There is a political commitment to looking at alternative ways of providing services and some services, including grounds maintenance and housing advice, are provided through external procurement. However, the absence of a procurement strategy contributes to the lack of strategic approach to exploring a range of methods of service delivery across the council. This is limiting the opportunities for greater service efficiency and improved services for customers.
- 60 The council is not making full use of information technology to drive service efficiency as a way of increasing capacity. However, some services such as planning are making effective use of new technology.
- 61 The council has missed opportunities to develop and maximise capacity through partnership. The council has recognised this and has renewed its active engagement in the LSP. However, partners' trust in the council to continue its involvement has, for now, been damaged.

- 62 On the positive side, some strategic partnerships are in place and contribute to delivering better quality services. Examples of this are the Project Integra waste partnership with the county, district councils and unitary authorities in Hampshire and providing leisure facilities jointly with the local education authority. Some service areas also use partnerships effectively to deliver priorities. In housing there are effective partnerships with neighbouring councils and housing associations to deliver affordable housing, and in community safety the council works with businesses, police and local community groups to address town centre crime and antisocial behaviour.
- 63 The new political administration is providing clear direction and leadership to the council. Political decision-making arrangements appear open and robust and the role of the scrutiny committee is developing. In spite of this, the majority party's decision to take all seats on the policy panel and to chair the scrutiny committee means opportunities to enable all councillors to contribute fully to decision making and increase corporate capacity are not being taken.
- 64 A member development programme is also enhancing the overall capacity of councillors. The council should encourage full participation in a comprehensive development programme to ensure the full potential of its councillors is realised.
- 65 Effective working relationships exist between executive councillors and senior managers. There a range of informal mechanism to keep councillors informed. In addition there are regular meetings between the leader and chief executive and cabinet and management team, both on an individual and collective basis.
- 66 The chief executive is providing good direction and is clear about what needs to be done to move the council forward. There are committed, dedicated and helpful frontline staff as well as some innovative and able service managers, who are helping to deliver the council's priorities.
- 67 The council's financial capacity is sound as evidenced by the financial auditor's assessment of financial standing. The financial capacity is enhanced by the transfer of housing stock and using the capital to fund affordable housing. But, the council's MTFS identifies growing pressure resulting from a stand still budget, as the council seeks to keep council tax increases in line with inflation.

Performance management

- 68 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in performance management.
- 69 The council has a poor track record of performance management. This is reflected in past Annual Audit letters and the external auditor's decision to qualify the council's best value performance plan (BVPP) in 2000/01 and 2001/02 due to its failure to produce accurate data for national performance indicators (PIs).
- 70 The council has not developed a consistent corporate approach to manage and improve its performance. While performance is improving in some individual service areas, there is little evidence of intervention to manage and improve performance across the council as a whole, with only 50 per cent of targets being met in the performance plan 2002/03.

- 71 The performance monitoring system does not provide a strategic overview of progress towards achievement of corporate objectives. The focus on individual service PIs does not provide management team or councillors with information to make this assessment. Corporate performance management is weakened by the lack of clearly specified outcomes and targets in the council's corporate plan. Similarly, there is a lack of challenging specific, measurable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) targets in the council's service plans and strategies. The council is addressing these weaknesses.
- 72 The council has been slow to implement a consistent approach to service planning across all services. Currently, there are a large number of service plans, in a variety of formats, which are of variable quality. The council recognises the need to develop its overall performance management framework and guidance and support is being provided to help managers prepare service plans.
- 73 Despite the variable quality of service plans, most managers and staff are clear about what is expected of them. A number of formal and informal mechanisms exist for cabinet both individually and collectively to meet with service managers to agree work programmes and assess performance and this information is communicated to staff through team meetings. The council also has a staff appraisal system to link personal performance targets to service and corporate objectives. However, staff appraisals are not being implemented consistently to a high standard and at the beginning of October, mid way through the year, 15 per cent of staff appraisals were outstanding.
- 74 There are weaknesses in risk management at a corporate and service level. Risk management is not yet fully embedded in the council's processes and is recognised by the council as an area requiring further work. In spite of this, some individual services demonstrate effective risk management. For example, the community safety service uses crime statistics to direct services to those areas where the risk and fear of crime are greatest.
- 75 Despite the council's commitment to achieving value for money, which is a key objective in order to limit increases in council tax rises, there are few tangible examples of cost-efficiency measures.
- 76 In spite of this lack of a co-ordinated corporate approach to improve cost-efficiency, some areas, such as electoral services have successfully reduced costs and improved access by introducing telephone voter registration and an all postal canvass. The reduced use of bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation is also resulting in savings.
- 77 There is now an effective system for reporting performance to management team and councillors. The council has recently introduced improved arrangements for performance monitoring, including quarterly PI monitoring reports to management team, scrutiny committee and cabinet. This helps to ensure senior managers and councillors are kept informed of the council's performance.
- 78 Financial management and monitoring is strong. The council's MTFs gives a solid base for corporate financial management. Managers have online access to financial management systems allowing them to manage and monitor budgets on a day-to-day basis. Councillors receive regular reports enabling them to make well-informed decisions about the council's financial position. The CPA auditor judgements (see Appendix 3) confirm that internal financial control, financial transactions and systems for financial monitoring and reporting are sound.

What has the council achieved/ not achieved to date?

Achievement in quality of service

- 79 On balance, weaknesses outweigh strengths in achievement of quality of service.
- 80 Overall satisfaction with the council's services at 66 per cent is below the national average, but is as expected based on levels of deprivation in the district. Added to this, satisfaction levels with individual services are extremely variable. The last BVPI survey showed that comparative satisfaction with services such as recycling and standards of cleanliness is high, but the council was in the worst performing 25 per cent for handling complaints and satisfaction by planning applicants.
- 81 External partners express satisfaction with the quality of core council services. Parish councils are generally satisfied with the overall quality of services, particularly sports and leisure facilities and refuse collection and recycling. They also agree that Hart District Council is working effectively to meet the housing needs of young people and those on low incomes. However, they do not think the council provides a good range of services for young people.
- 82 Hart District Council's performance is average compared with other councils based on national PIs. For 2001/02, 11 out of 39 (28 per cent) indicators for which comparable data is available were in the best 25 per cent nationally, with above average performance being achieved for a further 10 (26 per cent).
- 83 In contrast, 9 indicators (23 per cent) were in the worst 25 per cent. A particular area of weakness has been in the speed and accuracy of processing benefit claims, where the average costs of processing claims has also been high.
- 84 External assessments identify weaknesses in relation to service delivery. Audit Commission inspections provide 'fair' judgements of housing services (September 2001) and planning, land charges and economic development (May 2003). The recent Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) assessment, in July 2003, judged the performance of the council's housing and council tax benefits service as 'fair', and it was critical of some aspects of customer service and the failure to implement a plan to counter benefit fraud.
- 85 There is poor performance on refuse collection. This is important as it affects every household in the district. The problems are long-standing and are caused by a high level of vehicle breakdowns resulting from the design of the council's refuse collection vehicles. Despite the disruption caused to residents by high levels of missed bins over the last two years, and a variety of measures aimed at improving performance, only now is the council making decisions about fleet replacement.
- 86 Standards of customer care are inconsistent and the council has yet to develop a comprehensive corporate approach to ensure that it makes full use of user and staff feedback. This is important in ensuring all users receive a consistently good standard of service and that customers are actively involved in helping to shape service to meet their needs. The council recognises this and is taking appropriate action to implement a new corporate complaints system and commence a cross-cutting review of customer services.

- 87 The council has made some progress in addressing the needs of children and young people who have been identified by the community as a priority area for the council. For example, partnership working with other service providers has resulted in a range of facilities and opportunities, such as the skate park in Fleet. However, these tend to be focused in Fleet and for young people in rural areas access to these services may be limited.
- 88 However, the council is delivering good quality services in line with some of its corporate aims. It has been particularly successful in relation to its corporate theme of 'protecting the environment and improving the built environment'. A good example of this work is the major new development at Elvetham Heath. This has won a number of awards for the high quality of design and, through a successful partnership approach with the developers, the council has secured a range of environmental benefits including a nature reserve, woodland and a sustainable transport network. Similarly, at Fleet Pond the council is working with the pond trustees to provide safe public access to enhance people's enjoyment of this area, while protecting important breeding areas for native waterfowl.
- 89 It is also responding to the local priority to provide affordable homes and reduce homelessness, key objectives of its corporate theme of 'a place to live'. The council and its partners provide a good service for homeless people. It has also provided 280 new affordable homes since April 2001, exceeding its annual target of 60. Although, this is insufficient to meet the local need for affordable housing.
- 90 Other service areas providing good quality services to local residents include:
- ◆ well managed and maintained leisure facilities, providing a varied range of opportunities and programmes catering for the whole community, which is demonstrated in the high user numbers;
 - ◆ environmental health services, where the high level of customer care has been recognised by a Chartermark award;
 - ◆ revenue services, which achieve consistently high council tax and NNDR collection rates; and
 - ◆ building control, which meets the ISO 9002 quality standard.
- 91 The council's key strategic objective of maintaining council tax increases at or below the rate of inflation is being achieved, with Hart's element of local taxation increasing by only 2.5 per cent in the current year.

Achievement of improvement

- 92 On balance, strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 93 The overall performance trend on national PIs is mixed. A significant number of PIs were qualified in 2000/01 and in 2001/02, which limits the scope to assess whether the overall trend in PIs is improving and in particular whether it has improved for those indicators previously in the worst performing 25 per cent nationally. Nevertheless, the small number where a year-on-year comparison is possible shows that in 2001/02, the council maintained or improved its performance on 11 (65 per cent) of PIs, with declining performance on 6. The council has no overall objective of best 25 per cent performance for all PIs.

- 94 Pls are improving in service areas where past performance has been weak. An analysis of latest un-audited performance information for the period 1 April to 30 September 2003 shows a reduction in the time taken to process new benefit claims – down from 100 to 38 calendar days (better than national average), and in percentage of renewals processed within 14 days (best 25 per cent nationally). The latest quarterly performance figures from the department for work and pensions confirm the sustained improvements in this area. Similarly, there has been a considerable improvement in the speed of planning decisions, resulting in the council achieving the specific improvement target set for it by the ODPM for major planning applications. A recent survey indicates a big increase in satisfaction among planning applicants.
- 95 The council is delivering service improvements in line with corporate aims. It has significantly increased the number of new affordable homes provided in the district, up from 56 in 2001/02 to 115 in 2002/03 (110 in the first six months of 2003/04). This is an important strength in a key priority area for the local community.
- 96 Effective partnership work with Hart Housing Association and other agencies is reducing the number of people accepted as homeless and put on the housing register. At the same time over the past year, it has substantially reduced the number of people housed in B&B accommodation (down from 29 families in August 2002 to 2 families by August 2003). This has been achieved by actively working with other local housing providers making use of other short-term accommodation, including the private rented sector and use of surplus MOD accommodation. Through these actions the council is providing a much improved service to some of the people likely to be most in need in the district.
- 97 In partnership with local businesses, developers and voluntary organisations, the council is improving the quality of public spaces in residential and commercial areas. This is an appropriate focus for improvement given that the preservation and enhancement of the built and natural environment is an important issue for the community.
- 98 Performance is improving in national and corporate priority areas such as waste minimisation and recycling. Hart District Council is part of the county-wide strategic waste management group called Project Integra, which was awarded beacon status for waste management in 2001. The council has made steady progress to improve its recycling performance which currently stands at 14.6 per cent for 2003/04, an increase from 13.8 per cent (un-audited 2002/03) and 13 per cent in (2001/02). Although it fell short of its own target of 15 per cent in 2002/03.
- 99 Similarly, the council is making a positive impact in terms of reducing crime and the fear of crime. It plays an active and successful role in the work of the community safety partnership and this is recognised by partners. Although crime rates in Hart are low and falling the council has not been complacent and has implemented a range of innovative projects. A good example is the bus stop poster campaign to address recognised concerns in the community over the fear of crime. It is also targeting its resources at crime hot spots through park patrols and a comprehensive CCTV network, resulting in the reduction of antisocial behaviour and vandalism offences.

- 100 The council has substantially increased the rate of new housing development, in line with structure plan requirements. This is a key area of improvement given the pressure for new homes and anticipated population growth in future. Previously the council had fallen behind, having built only 85 per cent of the new homes to meet structure plan requirements in the period 1996/97 to 2000/01. In contrast in the past two years, with the major new development at Elvetham Heath, the council has completed 124 per cent of annualised structure plan requirements. By September 2003, it had achieved the required rate of 316 units a year for the plan period as a whole.
- 101 Successful use is made of the planning process to secure new community facilities. A good example of this is at Elvetham Heath where major new facilities including a community centre, sports pitches, children's playground and skate park have been provided.
- 102 The council is helping to improve access to local services. It works effectively in partnership to sustain the local economy, for example by enhancing town centres and supporting rural business.
- 103 The number of complaints referred to the council by the Local Government Ombudsman is falling (down from 22 in 2001/02 to 15 in 2002/03), none of which has resulted in maladministration being found.
- 104 In contrast, in the absence of clearly specified non-priority areas, the council's approach to budget reductions has been to allocate them to services on a pro-rata basis (see Prioritisation). This has the potential to lead to reductions in services considered important by local people. An example of this is the decision, subsequently reversed, to reduce expenditure through the closure of public conveniences. Budget cuts have also led to the loss of the service for residents experiencing noise nuisance out of office hours and removal of support for educational and promotional work in connection with recycling.
- 105 The council has made slow progress in making its services available electronically, with only 25 per cent online by April 2003 (worst 25 per cent nationally). In its self-assessment, the council recognises the need for further improvements in customer service, and the indications were that by September 2003, it had increased this to 45 per cent.
- 106 Audit Commission inspections provide 'uncertain prospects for improvement' judgements for the two service areas inspected. The recent BFI assessment, judged the council's housing and council tax benefits service proven capacity to improve as 'poor' and was critical of the council's failure to implement some of its past recommendations.
- 107 The council has a poor track record of meeting performance targets. In 2002/03, only 50 per cent of the council's own improvement targets were met. Combined with the absence of challenging targets to drive significant improvements this has resulted in partial improvement.

Investment

- 108 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the council's investment in the future.
- 109 The council is tackling the weaknesses it has identified in internal and external communications. Improvements have been made to processes to ensure the timely cascade of information to staff, including use of email to inform staff directly of management decisions supported by weekly team briefings. There are new forums for staff to meet and discuss issues with managers, which also provide new opportunities to share learning. As a result, there is a clearer understanding by managers and staff of the strategic direction of the new political leadership. External communication is also improving, through the increased frequency of Hart News now delivered quarterly to all homes, and through the newly created press office, ensuring the local community is better informed of the council's aims and the work it is undertaking to achieve them.
- 110 The council is making use of external expertise. For example, it has made effective use of consultants to advise it on how to develop and improve its strategic approach to housing, which has helped the council to develop a much improved approach to homelessness. It has also sought the advice of external consultants to advise it how to improve the corporate effectiveness of ICT and e-government. This work was completed in October and the council is now considering changes in the light of the consultant's recommendations.
- 111 Arrangements for risk management are improving. An outline risk management strategy has been put in place, coupled with briefings to raise staff awareness of the importance of risk management and how to ensure this. As a result risk assessment in service planning is improving and some services are already demonstrating effective risk management. For example, the recycling service carried out a detailed risk assessment in preparing the green waste scheme.
- 112 The council is introducing corporate policies and procedures, which are improving the overall effectiveness of human resource management. A good example is the new approach to recruitment and retention. Similarly, there is a new corporate focus to staff development. This is already delivering positive outcomes for example by ensuring that training plans, which historically were an aggregation of individuals' aspirations, meet the council's organisational development requirements. A new integrated payroll and personnel system is also being developed to provide management information to inform workforce planning.
- 113 The council is addressing long-standing weaknesses in its approach to performance management by putting in place additional staff in its policy team to support and develop performance improvement. This has led to improvements in the monitoring and reporting of PIs and service planning is developing. The council's staff appraisal system has also been reviewed and improved. Having produced a new corporate plan in January 2003, the council in its self-assessment recognises the need to review and improve the effectiveness of its corporate performance management framework. The council has set out a timetable to address this through a review of its corporate plan. So, while weaknesses remain, in particular a lack of specified targets and outcomes to support achievement of the council's broad ambitions, ongoing investment in performance systems is helping to put in place clearer linkages between corporate objectives and service plans.

- 114 Weaknesses in corporate management are recognised by the council and these are being tackled as part of its restructuring. The council has already taken opportunities to fill some gaps in the structure, for example new posts in planning and key management appointments in human resources and press office. The positive impact of which is already evident in improved service delivery.
- 115 The council is also improving its political decision-making process, for example by reviewing and enhancing the role of its scrutiny committee. It has done this by separating the scrutiny and policy development functions, which is helping to give a clear focus and capacity for councillors to undertaking these roles effectively.
- 116 The council is investing to improve services for local people. For example, spending £430,000 to meet the requirements of the disability discrimination act in terms of physical access to council buildings and a £100,000 programme to improve children's playgrounds in line with European safety requirements.
- 117 The council is taking action to tackle local priorities. In partnership with the Countryside Agency, Hampshire County Council and a number of parish councils, the council provided funding for 'Cango' a new community transport project operated by Hart Voluntary Action. This is in direct response to the 2001 residents' survey which identified public transport as the top improvement priority.
- 118 The council has succeeded in securing external funding to support improved service delivery, for example DEFRA funding of £160,000 for a green waste collection and recycling service. Other examples include money from the single regeneration budget (SRB) for a town centre manager in Odiham and £216,000 from the Home Office to extend its CCTV system. In partnership with Rushmoor, it has also secured £1.5 million government funding to provide key worker housing, which is of particular importance given the local priority for affordable homes. In spite of these successes, the council recognises it needs to be more proactive in identifying and securing external funding to improve services, and it is seeking to address this through joint working with the Hampshire councils.
- 119 The council is using planning agreements to secure investment. For example, it has negotiated 20-year maintenance contributions from developers for the maintenance of public space in large new housing developments. This is important as it helps to ensure sustainable plans can be put in place for the long-term management of open spaces for the benefit of the local community.
- 120 The council is becoming more open to external challenge. It initiated an early review of corporate effectiveness by Volanti Consulting in October 2002, which was subsequently followed by the IDeA peer review in June 2003, in preparation for CPA. The council has responded positively to the Volanti report for example, acting on identified weaknesses in internal communication. It is also changing the emphasis of its best value review programme to focus on strategic cross-cutting areas, such as customer wellbeing, rather than individual services.
- 121 The council has significant un-allocated capital resources, totalling £9.5 million, to meet future investment requirement. However, the current interim capital programme, which is not aligned to corporate themed objectives, is due to end in March 2004. While there are plans to consider and agree a new medium-term capital programme shortly, it is unclear how the council will determine future investment priorities. For example, there is a funding gap of £450,000 in the council's e-government strategy.
- 122 Further investment is still required in corporate systems and processes to ensure an effective council-wide approach to project management and procurement.

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

Learning

- 123 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in the council's ability to learn.
- 124 The council is aware of weaknesses in terms of learning and in its self-assessment identifies the need to improve the sharing of good practice between and across service areas.
- 125 The council has been slow to learn and improve systems and services. For example, the external auditor continues to express concerns in the audit plan and the council has been slow to respond to previous criticisms over the need for an effective performance management framework. The council has also been slow to develop a clear strategic approach to the long-standing problems of missed bin collection and addressing the problems arising from poor vehicle maintenance.
- 126 The council is not learning systematically from external sources, for example through actively benchmarking with other service providers. Links with some voluntary organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau are good but the council does not use its links with a range of partners and users to both influence service delivery by other providers and improve its own service provision.
- 127 Opportunities to learn from local people are not being maximised. Good communication systems are in place, such as Hart News, for telling people what the council is doing. While these include surveys, gaps remain in the council's overall approach to consulting the local community and in the use of customer feedback and complaints to improve services.
- 128 Learning is not yet shared systematically across the council. However, the council is beginning to tackle this with improved briefing mechanisms for staff. There are examples where individual services are actively seeking to learn from the experiences of staff – such as through quality and improvement circles – and to use this learning to improve service delivery.
- 129 Internally learning opportunities are being lost. In some parts of the council communication systems, such as team briefings, provide learning opportunities through effective two-way communication. However, these are not consistently applied to an agreed standard across the council as a whole, with the result that the council is not harnessing fully staff ideas and innovation to improve services.
- 130 In contrast, the council is able to learn from past experiences and make improvements as a result. A good example of this is the approach it has taken to the modernising agenda. Executive and scrutiny arrangements were introduced to the council in May 2001, and a joint councillor and officer working group was set up to carry out an ongoing evaluation. The learning from the original model was used to refine the arrangements, reducing the number of scrutiny and policy review panels to three and better aligning them to executive councillors' responsibilities. In May 2003, further changes were made to strengthen the scrutiny function.

- 131 The council is also applying the learning from past housing developments effectively to improve the quality of new schemes. Learning in this area is being applied across a number of service areas in order to achieve broader corporate objectives. So, over a period of time, as successive development schemes have taken place, the council has increased the quality of design and secured a higher density of development, while also achieving enhanced environmental outcomes and improved community benefits through planning agreements. This learning is now being used corporately to inform the revision of the local plan.
- 132 There are other examples of effective corporate learning, both from past experience and from good practice, including improved project management of ICT procurement, changes to the council's budget setting process following problems in 2003/04 to ensure spending plans reflect priorities, refinement and strengthening of Section 106 (S106) agreements and enhanced staff appraisal systems.
- 133 The council is aware of the challenges it faces. The council's proposals for restructuring show good self-awareness of the current weaknesses in corporate management capacity and a clear understanding of the changes needed not only to management structures and roles, but also to service delivery arrangements to improve services for the local community.
- 134 The council has recognised the damaging effects of its failure for a short time to engage fully in the LSP and has taken the step of creating a cabinet post with responsibility for people and partnerships. Further work is needed to demonstrate to partners the council's genuine commitment to such strategic partnerships and to help to positively support community ambitions.
- 135 Some service areas learn from external sources to improve their services. For example, through Project Integra Hart is able to learn from working practices and trial projects such as the learning from East Hampshire's approach to refuse collection and recycling. This is helping to inform the council's future decisions concerning waste management. The council's approach to the prevention of homelessness is improving in line with good practice elsewhere, for example, the use of private landlords forum and family mediation.

Future plans

- 136 Weaknesses outweigh strengths on future plans.
- 137 There is a general lack of a co-ordination over longer-term planning. A further area of weakness is the lack of effective project management arrangements to deliver future plans.
- 138 Few of the council's written plans have SMART targets and without clear milestones the council is not well placed to measure and assess progress and take action in response to changing local and national priorities.
- 139 Some plans are still to be developed including waste and leisure plans. There are no plans covering social inclusion or open space and neither are these topics integrated into mainstream planning. A draft communications strategy has been prepared for 'telling people about Hart council and what it is doing' but this does not fully address acknowledged weaknesses in internal communications and is mostly concerned with PR issues.

- 140 To date, the local community and its partners have not been effectively engaged in helping to develop the council's plans. In its self-assessment, the council recognises the need to review the corporate plan and strengthen links between corporate and community priorities.
- 141 The council has well developed and resourced plans to improve the range of kerb side recycling services it provides and substantially increase recycling levels, to meet the national targets set for 2004/05. Consideration is being given to a range of future management options; however, there is no firm plan in place to meet the challenging statutory recycling targets for 2005/06.
- 142 The council plans to bridge a potential funding gap in its MTFS to achieve its objective of inflation-only increases in council tax, through improvements in efficiency, income generation and more effective use of information technology. According to its MTFS, the council's objective of inflation-only council tax rises will require a reduction in real terms in revenue expenditure equivalent to £1.2 million over the next three years (15 per cent in total). However, some plans while ambitious are not realistic. For example, the council plans to meet the Government's target for all services to be available electronically by the end of 2005. Progress so far indicates that a huge jump in performance is needed between 2003/04 and 2004/05 to meet those targets and funding remains uncertain.
- 143 The council faces difficult decisions if it is to continue to meet future housing needs while protecting against greenfield development. For example, Queen Elizabeth II Barracks (QEB) is a key brownfield site that is allocated for residential development in the adopted local plan. Bringing QEB forward for development at the present time is critical both in terms of maintaining an adequate land supply to meet structure plan requirements, and in providing a mechanism through developers' contributions to deliver new affordable homes to meet local housing need. Yet development of the site is controversial and it is not yet clear how the council will meet the challenge of these difficult decisions when facing strong local opposition. If the site does not go ahead, the council will be forced to release other greenfield land. In the meantime, there will be delays and uncertainty over the council's ability to meet future housing needs. Both of these outcomes are contrary to the council's objectives.
- 144 There is a mixed picture with regard to the quality of the council's statutory plans. The community safety strategy has been recognised by the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) as one of the best in the region and the council's homelessness strategy is providing a sound basis for improved service delivery.
- 145 In contrast, the council's housing strategy has been assessed by GOSE as below average and there is no strategy in place for renewing the private sector housing stock.
- 146 The council has a clear plan and has allocated additional resources to tackle weaknesses in its development plans. It recognises that the local plan is no longer able to deliver its current priorities of protecting the environment against greenfield development and meet local need for affordable housing. An updated housing needs assessment is due to be completed by January 2004 and is appointing consultants to advise the council on changes to its housing policies aimed at maximising the supply of affordable housing. This work is due to be completed by March 2004 and the updated policy guidance will then be used to inform a formal revision of the local plan.

- 147 The council plans to tackle identified weaknesses in corporate capacity, through a restructure of senior management. This will create a new team of corporate directors and heads of service with substantially more management responsibility to support the chief executive in the strategic management of the council. The new structure, which is supported by detailed implementation plans and funding to meet transitional cost, is due to be formally approved by the council in early December. The council plans to make appointments to the new post in February, with the new structure in place and fully operational by 1 June 2004.
- 148 An overarching community strategy is in development. A draft strategy, reflecting the views of partners, has been prepared and agreed by the LSP, outlining a community vision, five key themes and a series of high level aims and objectives. The council is leading work on the environment theme. An action plan with clear milestones is now in place to consult the local community on the draft strategy, consider any necessary changes in the light of the public consultation exercise and to adopt and publish the finalised community strategy by end of April 2004.
- 149 The council is continuing to develop and improve its overall performance management framework. This sets a clear hierarchy of annual plans at individual and service level which are helping it to focus service delivery on corporate objectives. The council plans for all service areas to produce their service plans in the new corporate format for 2004/05 and has clear timescales, supported by a training programme to do so. The review of the council's corporate plan, which is being carried out in parallel with the community planning process and to similar timescales, is now well underway.

Summary of theme scores and strengths / weaknesses

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> council aims reflect a good understanding of the key issues facing the community clear political direction and improving awareness by stakeholders of the council's ambitions community leadership to deliver local needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> corporate plan fails to articulate long-term ambitions corporate themes are not translated into measurable outcomes ambitions have not been determined by working with partners and the community through the LSP
Prioritisation	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> council is responding to locally expressed priorities in some areas; for example, community safety some resources shifted to match priority areas; for example, planning, community transport and affordable housing some services prioritising resources to focus on areas of greatest need; for example, community safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not making full use of opportunities to understand the needs of local people to inform priorities council has not clearly expressed non-priority areas MTFS not assisting prioritisation of resources potentially conflicting priorities in corporate plan need to improve internal and external communication of priorities is acknowledged
Focus	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sustained focus over time on key objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> affordable homes protecting the environment scrutiny committee strongly focused on key issues for local people clear focus on maintaining low council tax effective mechanism to sustain corporate focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lack of consistent focus on relationships with all stakeholders political responsibilities not focused on cross-cutting ambitions
Capacity	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clear political leadership and effective working relationships with senior managers chief executive provides clear direction committed staff and skilled service managers sound financial standing some effective partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lack of corporate management capacity and management development programme project management weak no strategic management of procurement IT not used corporately to drive service efficiency not maximising capacity through external partnerships growing pressure on budgets opportunities for all councillors to contribute not fully developed
Performance management	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> appraisals help managers and staff be clear what's expected, but inconsistently applied improved system for monitoring and reporting PIs to councillors and managers strong financial management and monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> poor track record; for example, BVPIs qualified 2000/01 and 2001/02 consistent corporate approach to manage and improve performance not yet in place; for example, 50 per cent of targets in performance plan not met performance systems not linked to achieving corporate objectives lack of SMART targets in corporate/ service plans variable quality of service plans risk management not fully developed few examples of cost-efficiency measures
Achievement in quality of service	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> partners generally satisfied with core services providing good quality services in line with corporate aims of protecting the environment and providing affordable homes leisure and environmental health services meeting key objective of low council tax rises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> overall satisfaction below average and variable levels of satisfaction with individual services fair judgements for AC inspections of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> housing planning, land charges and economic development revenues and benefits service rated as fair by BFI poor performance in refuse collection inconsistent standards of customer care

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement of improvement	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> trend on PIs mixed overall, but improving in areas which were weak; for example, speed of planning decisions and processing benefit claims delivering improvements in line with corporate ambitions; for example, reducing use of B&B and increase in new affordable homes improving in national priority areas; for example, recycling crime reduction significantly improved the rate of delivery of new homes in line with structure plan requirements new community facilities secured through S106 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> statutory recycling targets will not be achieved 'slow progress in making services available online uncertain' improvement in AC inspections and poor rating from BFI partial improvement only against performance targets
Investment	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new and improved corporate processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communications HR and ICT performance management political decision making additional management capacity; for example, HR funding improvements to priority local services; for example, Cango bus external funding of service improvements; for example, green waste scheme funded by DEFRA using external challenge to develop corporate processes; for example, Volanti report and IT consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no medium-term capital programme aligned to corporate objectives unclear how future investment priorities will be decided some corporate processes require further investment; for example, project management and procurement
Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some learning from past experiences to improve service outcomes; for example, new developments and scrutiny process the council is aware of the challenges it faces some services learning from external sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> council acknowledges learning is an area which needs improving slow to learn and improve systems and services no systematic and comprehensive approach to learning from others not making full use of feedback to improve services sharing of good practice limited
Future plans	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some strong plans; for example, community safety co-ordinated approach to reviewing local plan in conjunction with re-assessing housing need plans for management restructure progressing clear plan to developing community strategy and reviewing performance management framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lack of co-ordinated approach to longer-term planning lack of project management arrangements to deliver future plans few SMART targets in plans to assess progress some plans still to be developed or integrated into main stream planning other lack realism; for example, IEG strategy external partners not engaged fully in developing plans uncertainty over future land supply to meet structure plan requirements some weak plans; for example, housing strategy

Scoring key:

- 1 - Weak
- 2 - Weaknesses outweigh strengths
- 3 - Strengths outweigh weaknesses
- 4 – Strong

Appendix 1 - Balancing housing markets (BHM) diagnostic assessment

How well does the council understand its housing market and from its understanding has the council developed the right proposals to help balance its housing markets?

- 150 The council has a good understanding of the local housing market and a range of strategies are in place to help meet the housing needs of the area. However, the strategies are not well aligned and do not fully reflect corporate priorities. The council is aware of these shortcomings and is tackling them. However, at the present time, weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.
- 151 A comprehensive research base provides an up-to-date understanding of the local housing market and housing needs. The council has carried out an urban capacity study to assess land availability for new homes and regularly updates its information base on housing needs and stock condition. It carried out housing needs surveys in 1994 and 1998 and a further needs survey is currently under way. Early in 2004, the council will update its 1999 house condition survey in partnership with other Hampshire councils. This will inform its approach to improving and adapting the existing stock. It has a good understanding of the needs of elderly, young and vulnerable people through working with other agencies such as social services, the primary care trust and the probation service. GOSE recognises that Hart's needs analysis and data sources are strengths. This sound research base is important if the council is to develop appropriate policies and strategies to effectively target actions.
- 152 The council works effectively with Hart Housing Association to obtain information on local needs from the housing register, such as tenure and family size. This adds to the council's knowledge of the local housing market and helps tailor provision to match current demand.
- 153 In partnership with other councils in Hampshire and Surrey, Hart has commissioned a sub-regional study of the Blackwater Valley to provide a strategic context for future development.
- 154 The council has a good understanding of the need for affordable housing in the area and the serious shortfall in supply. High house prices in relation to incomes put pressure on the affordability of housing. From its housing needs survey the council estimates a demand for 1,800 affordable homes between 1995 and 2003. This equates to 360 affordable homes each year, of which half should be new build. This is a significant challenge for the council, amounting to half of the completions needed each year to meet structure plan allocations.
- 155 Meeting housing needs and maximising affordable housing are priorities for the council and an appropriate range of plans is in place, including the recently adopted local plan and strategies for housing, homelessness, supporting people, energy conservation and fuel poverty. The relationship between the research findings and the plans is clear in most cases. Links between strategies and to national and regional agendas are explicit. This provides a useful start point for the council in tackling local housing needs.

- 156 The council uses a range of effective mechanisms to develop strategies based on local needs. It consults with housing associations, tenants associations, developers, parish councils and other voluntary agencies. A good example is the identification of rural exception sites in partnership with parish councils. The council develops its strategies and plans in conjunction with partners and stakeholders. A number of mechanisms are in place.
- 157 Good partnership working with statutory agencies, such as social services, probation and the youth offending team has led to an improved understanding of the causes of homelessness and a multi-agency approach to finding solutions. This has resulted in a significant drop in homelessness and use of B&B.
- 158 However, there are gaps in information and other research is out of date. A new housing needs survey is under way, but there are no formal mechanisms to regularly obtain information about the private rented sector or for monitoring trends in house prices and incomes. There is only limited understanding of the number of empty homes, needs of key workers and minority and hard-to-reach groups. These gaps prevent the council from tailoring services to address the needs of the whole community.
- 159 The plans were produced at different times and are not well aligned. Although the local plan was adopted only last year, its lengthy preparation time means that the plan is already out-of-date and does not provide a sound basis to guide future housing development in the area. Some key strategies are missing, for example, how the council will support the renewal of the private sector housing stock following the removal of discretionary grants. As a result, the plans do not provide a clear strategic framework to ensure that proposals come forward in a co-ordinated way.
- 160 The housing strategies are of variable quality. GOSE rates the current housing strategy as 'below average' and supporting people as 'fair'. The links between strategies and priorities within them are clear but effective delivery mechanisms, such as SMART action plans, are missing. Their usefulness is also reduced by the absence of a strategic vision that is shared by partners and stakeholders. As a result there is no clear expression of what the council intends to do to meet local housing needs or how the individual plans support this.
- 161 The council's temporarily withdrawal from the local strategic partnership (LSP) in its formative stages earlier this year has delayed the development of a clear strategic vision for housing that is shared by key partners. This was a missed opportunity. However, the partnership is now back on track, and work is underway to establish a common purpose and define objectives for the environment.
- 162 The council has not made clear how it will reconcile the political commitment to reduce Hart's share of the strategic housing allocation, while meeting its long-established and continuing priorities to meet housing needs, maximise affordable housing and protect the environment.

- 163 This tension is not resolved by the current local plan. It sets out planning policies to meet the future need for new homes in line with the Hampshire structure plan, including thresholds for new affordable homes. The plan allocates land for 4,166 dwellings between 1996 and 2009 on both brownfield (previously developed) land and greenfield sites. It holds a greenfield site at Hitches Lane in reserve which will only be released if the council cannot fulfil its housing allocations on brownfield sites at a rate that maintains an adequate supply of building land. The scale and location of development in the local plan has become an emotive issue locally. This has found expression in the corporate plan as a desire to reduce Hart's share of the strategic housing allocations.
- 164 Until recently, new housing completions have been well below annualised structure plan targets (85 per cent in the period 1996/97 to 2000/01). This critical picture for land supply has improved significantly in recent years with the large scale release of new homes at Elvetham Heath. As a result, by September 2003 the council had achieved an annualised rate of 316 units over the plan period. The council has also undertaken an urban capacity study to identify alternative sources of land supply, optimise the use of brownfield land and increase the yield through higher densities. As a result, the council believes it can meet its structure plan allocations without using greenfield land, such as Hitches Lane. To do so it needs to deliver a controversial major development at Queen Elizabeth II Barracks (QEB). The corporate and political commitment to deliver this on time in the face of strong local opposition is unknown.

What are the council's actions and what outcomes has it achieved in helping to balance housing markets?

- 165 The council works effectively in partnership to deliver its housing priorities. It has a track record on providing affordable housing; however, progress is limited in some areas due to a lack of capacity. On balance, strengths outweigh weaknesses.
- 166 The council uses its resources effectively to deliver affordable housing through:
- ◆ careful management of capital funds enabling a grant programme of £2 million per year for social housing;
 - ◆ sale of surplus land delivering 50 units on small sites; and
 - ◆ negotiations with private house builders to maximise Section 106 agreements.
- 167 Since the transfer of its housing stock in 1994, the council has delivered an average of 60 new affordable homes each year. A total of 673 new units have been built since then, in a variety of different tenures. These include shared ownership, rented and key worker accommodation as well as other specialist accommodation. Numbers have increased significantly (280 units since April 2001) with the construction of a major new housing development at Elvetham Heath. Affordable housing in rural areas has been provided through the council's rural exception sites policy. However, this falls short of the 180 new affordable dwellings needed each year.

- 168 While annual targets for new affordable homes are being achieved, the council has not assessed whether the housing market in the area could accept a higher percentage, than the 25 per cent required by the current local plan. This assessment forms part of the council's response to recent changes in funding through local authority social housing grant (LASHG).
- 169 The council promotes the release of housing sites through the use of development briefs and pre-application discussions, which is improving its performance in handling major planning applications. Efficient use of land is achieved by promoting higher densities, such as 40 dwellings per hectare at QEB. A separate subcommittee oversees the development of major sites to minimise delays and ensure consistency. However, the absence of up-to-date SPG to deal with housing issues is a weakness that the council recognises and is remedying. A programme of new supplementary planning guidance (SPG) is currently under way.
- 170 The council works with preferred partner housing associations to develop affordable housing and with developers to agree timescales, share resources and responsibilities, such as preparing the development brief and attending public meetings. In the case of QEB, the developer is preparing the draft S106 agreement, providing administrative staff to help process the application, and paying directly for postage costs. This eases the additional burdens imposed on a small council by large scale proposals.
- 171 To improve its housing completions, the council is bringing forward alternative sites, such as brownfield land allocated for employment, for example the Old Dairy site in Fleet. The council is currently considering a planning application for Waterfront Business Park for 220 dwellings. Such sites can make a valuable contribution to the supply of new homes.
- 172 The council identifies planning as a priority service and has shifted resources accordingly. It has allocated an additional £160,000 to increase planning staff levels at a time when other services are subject to budget cuts. Planning and housing staff now operate within a single business unit and work constructively together to facilitate the release of major sites. A single portfolio holder is responsible for services, providing focus and direction.
- 173 The council has greatly improved the way it deals with homelessness and significantly reduced the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. Through a more robust assessment and close working with other agencies, the council is able to offer better advice and greater choice to people. As a result the number of people accepted as homeless has fallen. From April to August 2003, the council accepted 19 families as homeless, compared to 66 for the equivalent period last year. The use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families has similarly dropped from 29 families in August last year to only one at the present time. The council is on track to meet government targets for bed and breakfast. However, numbers on the housing register remain at around 1,000 indicating the level of local need.
- 174 The council works effectively with wider regional and sub-regional agencies. For example, close working with occupational health and social services help target assistance for elderly people.

- 175 Partnership working is particularly strong with the neighbouring council, Rushmoor. These initiatives help the council increase its capacity to deliver results that it could not otherwise have achieved on its own. These include:
- ◆ new affordable homes at Pyestock estate in Cove and Elvetham Heath for people on both Rushmoor's and Hart's waiting lists;
 - ◆ using vacant MOD property as a cost-effective alternative to B&B;
 - ◆ securing £1.5 million government funding to provide key worker housing;
 - ◆ a joint approach to supported housing, including the Staying Put Agency, which helps elderly and vulnerable people remain in their own homes; and
 - ◆ a jointly funded mother and baby unit in Fleet and young single persons hostel in Farnham.
- 176 Homelessness, advice and the housing register are contracted out to Hart Housing Association and the council is using consultants to develop its new housing strategy, improve the way it deals with homelessness and undertake research into affordable housing policies. However, there is very limited in-house staffing capacity to support the council's housing priority. This has been exacerbated by recruitment problems. Limited capacity may result in missed opportunities to explore new initiatives and approaches which might enhance the service, particularly given the impact of changes in LASHG.
- 177 Staff are highly capable and committed. But the competing demands on staff time make services reactive and opportunistic. For example, housing associations are often brought into discussions with developers too late to influence the location, tenure and size of new affordable housing. This can also result in poor physical and social integration of affordable homes such as at Elvetham Heath, where some of the social housing adjoins the M3.
- 178 The council recognises that it needs to do more to intervene in the private sector market. It has recently improved its rent deposit scheme to encourage more private rental properties to come forward. However, there are no forums for private landlords and estate agents or opportunities to engage with other potential partners such as the MOD which has substantial property holdings in the area. These are missed opportunities that could allow the council to address repeat homelessness.
- 179 There is no strategy for renewing the private sector housing stock and the council has missed the July deadline to decide how it will target financial assistance to home owners to improve their homes following the removal of the system of discretionary grants. The council plans to update its 1999 house condition survey next year, and this will inform its new approach. The council is considering a system of loans but the capital funding is not secure. In the meantime, the council is only dealing with mandatory grants for disabled facilities and collating a waiting list for people seeking financial assistance for home improvements.

How well does the council monitor its progress and impact in helping to balance housing markets and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?

- 180 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area. Performance management is underdeveloped leading to mixed monitoring of progress. However, the council is clear about the challenges it faces and how it will tackle them.
- 181 Mechanisms to monitor performance are highly developed in some areas but weak in others. The council now monitors housing completions, urban capacity and windfall sites monthly to ensure that it stays on track in relation to its housing allocations. These are reported annually on a county-wide basis to the joint advisory panel. In addition, through annually monitoring its social housing grant programme, the council records achievements in affordable housing. This means that the council has a clear understanding of its housing land supply. In turn this has informed discussions on the need to review the local plan and policies on affordable housing.
- 182 The council uses a range of mechanisms which allow it to monitor what it has achieved. Councillors receive quarterly monitoring reports on the speed of deciding planning applications through the members' information bulletin. Other formal systems are in place to record the use of brownfield land, and of other planning statistics such as appeals. Detailed information is also collected for trends in homelessness, the housing register and use of bed and breakfast and other temporary accommodation. This is supplied monthly by Hart Housing Association. Performance indicators are reported in the council's annual performance plan. The portfolio holder for planning receives information monthly reports on performance indicators.
- 183 In contrast, the council is not assessing overall achievement against its corporate objectives in relation to the impact of strategic planning on affordable housing. For example, it is not monitoring the impact of local plan policies on housing provision. This is preventing it developing a 'plan, monitor, manage' approach to assessing the plan's impact on the housing market as recommended by Planning Policy Guidance Note 3.
- 184 The council's strategies and plans do not provide clear measurable targets and outcomes to improve services for local people. For example, the housing strategy action plan sets a target to 'provide as much key worker housing as possible' and 'maintain a high quality housing advice and homelessness service'.
- 185 Service plans are of variable quality and do not provide a clear basis for prioritising the work of teams and individuals. There is no clear link between the corporate plan, housing strategies and service plans. In addition, the housing and planning services have produced improvement plans following best value reviews. There is no clear single statement for services directing their actions and priorities. This also encourages an opportunistic, reactive approach to service delivery.

- 186 The council is taking advantage of learning opportunities provided by the consultants who are currently supporting the service, for example in developing its approach to homelessness. The council is applying lessons from experience at Elvetham Heath to layout and design at QEB. However, mechanisms for capturing feedback from stakeholder, partners and service users are limited and mainly informal. Likewise, learning from others and through best practice relies on the initiative of individuals which is limited by the service's lack of capacity.
- 187 The council is aware of the challenges it faces and is very clear about what it needs to do. A key issue is the council's future ability to deliver affordable housing following LASHG reform. The council has made bids of £25 million from transitional funding arrangements but has yet to confirm how much it will allocate from its own capital budget. The council also needs to remove uncertainties over land allocations in the local plan.
- 188 The council is investing in range of new initiatives to tackle these issues:
- ◆ researching alternative policies and funding mechanisms to deliver affordable housing following changes to LASHG;
 - ◆ updating research on housing needs and stock condition to inform new housing strategy;
 - ◆ reviewing key housing policies as the basis of a formal alteration to the local plan and subsequent local development framework; and
 - ◆ deciding the future level of council funding for affordable housing.
- 189 These actions have the potential to provide greater certainty for the future balancing of the housing market. However, there is no co-ordinated project plan to manage this process, and responsibilities are split between different managers. Given the limited resources and underdeveloped state of performance management, this is a weakness the council needs to address.

Summary of balancing housing markets diagnostic judgements and strengths / weaknesses

Area of focus	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
How well does the council understand its housing market and from its understanding has the council developed the right proposals to help balance its housing markets?	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> comprehensive research base and good understanding of housing market – being updated good understanding of need for affordable housing and shortfall in supply range of strategies in place, produced in consultation with partners meeting housing needs and maximising affordable housing are corporate priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lack of strategic vision developed in conjunction with stakeholders strategies vary in quality, are poorly aligned and do not include SMART action plans some gaps in knowledge and key strategies missing no private sector renewal strategy to meet July 2003 deadline in response to RRO local plan out-of-date and not providing certainty threshold for affordable housing not challenging conflicting corporate priorities to meet housing needs
What are the council's actions and what outcomes has it achieved in helping to balance housing markets?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 673 affordable homes built in last 9 years resources shifted in line with priorities – additional £160,000 for planning integration of planning and housing within single portfolio effective partnerships and cross-boundary working pro-active approach to preventing homelessness and reducing B&B use facilitating release of major sites flexible approach to bringing forward alternative sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited capacity to develop proactive approach critical brownfield land supply – about to be tested lack of SPG absence of specific targeted outcomes limited intervention in private sector housing market
How well does the council monitor its progress and impact in helping to balance housing markets and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitoring housing completions including affordable homes monitoring of homelessness and use of housing register some learning from past experience awareness of challenges and weaknesses and clear approach to tackle them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> poorly developed performance management no clear link between corporate plan, housing strategies and service plans not monitoring policies in local plan uncertainty over future funding through LASHG proposed future actions not consolidated within explicit framework
Balancing housing markets diagnostic assessment judgement	C		

Scoring key:

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

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

Appendix 2 - Public space diagnostic assessment

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

- 190 The council manages the physical environment well. Strengths outweigh weaknesses and consequently there is a low need for service improvement.
- 191 Hart has a high quality built and natural environment. The council recognises that management of the environment is a key priority for local people and this was highlighted in a MORI residents' survey in 2001. The council has set its corporate and service priorities to reflect this and the emerging community strategy has the management of the physical environment as a core objective. These strategies and plans help the council stay focused on maintaining and enhancing the local environment.
- 192 The council, through its planning process, has been successful in the development of a high quality built environment that is sympathetic to the area and provides safe communities for people to live in. The design and construction of new buildings is generally of high quality due to the enforcement of clear and detailed development briefs, advice from planners and consultants and good communication with major developers. The council recognises the achievements of developers through its design awards, which also help to share good practice and innovative ideas.
- 193 The council is addressing its poor performance in the speed of determining planning applications and has made significant process in the last 12 months. It has improved from being in the worst 25 per cent of all councils nationally in 2001/02 to above average performance in 2002/03 (un-audited figures). This improvement has been across all categories of planning applications. The council has reached the specific improvement target set for it for major planning applications, by the ODPM, but it still falls short of overall national targets.
- 194 The council has a good understanding of sustainable development and works effectively in partnership to address economic, environmental and social sustainability issues. It has helped develop the local economy through town centre improvements and funding for town centre managers in Fleet and Odiham. It also helps the rural economy by supporting local businesses and large employers such as RAF Odiham.
- 195 Protecting the environment through the planning system and in partnership the local and national agencies is strong. The council has worked with developers to support biodiversity in new developments such as Elvetham and Bartley Heath. Green transport plans are a requirement of all new large developments and the council has produced conservation area proposals statements for most of its 32 conservation areas. Partnership work with agencies such as the Fleet Pond Society and English Nature is helping to improve the quality and access to key conservation sites, while ensuring the protection of these sites through careful management and education.

- 196 The council has a good track record on achieving improvements in the provision and long-term maintenance of open space through the planning process. The council has negotiated a wide range of facilities on new development sites through Section 106 (S106) agreements. Examples include.
- ◆ community facilities and a nature reserve at Elvetham Heath;
 - ◆ leisure facilities and maintenance of open space as part of the Galley Hill Road housing development; and
 - ◆ town centre management and enhancement in Fleet through the Hart shopping centre development.
- 197 The council has good systems in place to assess and monitor a range of pollution and public disturbance issues and responds quickly to address them. Its environmental health team provides an effective service. There are clear customer standards, which are monitored and reviewed. The council has reduced its out of hours noise service and as a result is not meeting its set customer response time standards and there is a reduced service to the public.
- 198 The council is improving access to services in rural areas. Good examples include the Hook one-stop shop, The Cango community transport initiative and support for village post offices. However, partnerships with other agencies and businesses to support access to council services still need development.
- 199 The council is not maximising the potential of all developments in the area. The current local plan does not stipulate a specific percentage that developers should contribute and is imprecise about the level of open space provision.
- 200 The council's understanding of the districts of open space needs is limited. There is no overall assessment to identify requirements for the whole district. For example, there has been no playing pitch or open space assessment. This weakens negotiations with developers for contributions towards open space that are an identified need for an area but not necessarily a specific development site.
- 201 The council is poor at addressing the needs of people with disabilities. It does not have an access officer or officers in departments responsible for access issues. Communication with people with disabilities is weak and the council is not consulting effectively with community disabled groups to ensure good access to council and community facilities and services.
- 202 Access to council buildings for people with disabilities is limited with only 30 per cent of buildings meeting the requirements of the disabilities discrimination act. However, a detailed audit has been undertaken and a resourced action plan is in place, this will ensure the council meets the requirements of the act by October 2004.
- 203 The council has not fully addressed the way its own services contribute to sustainability particularly in terms of their impact on the environment. The council has not undertaken a comprehensive environmental review of all council services. Although environmental efficiencies have been made in a number of areas, following consultants' reports, there is no systematic management of environmental impacts in order to maintain a focus on sustainable issues.

Does the council help keep the locality clean?

- 204 The council's waste collection service is poor and although some areas of waste management are strong overall performance is mixed. Weaknesses outweigh strengths and consequently there is a high need for service improvement.
- 205 Performance on waste collection is poor and the council has been slow to address this over a number of years. The number of missed bins has been in the worst 25 per cent for the last four years, and over the last six months, performance has deteriorated further. In the last three months, approximately 21,000 households have not had their waste collected on the scheduled day, this equates to about 10,000 missed bins per 1,000 population per month, set against the council's target of 350.
- 206 The council is addressing these service failings and has introduced new working practices, a new maintenance contract and a new vehicle, but the current vehicle fleet remains unreliable. This service is a priority for improvement for the council and an options appraisal for future waste management has begun. Currently there is no detailed resourced action plan in place to improve the service.
- 207 The council's current statutory recycling plan is not fully developed. There are no significant budget increases or capital resources identified to address changes in working practices or investment in equipment needed to reach the next challenging national recycling target of 33 per cent by 2005/06. It is therefore not clear whether the council will meet its commitment to reach this target.
- 208 Commitment to addressing waste minimisation and recycling has been reduced by that lack of a dedicated education officer. The loss of this post, as part of budget cuts in April 2003, will affect the council's capacity to meet and sustain its commitment to reduce the amount of waste collected and increase recycling and re-use.
- 209 The council's public conveniences are of poor quality. There has been no significant investment in them over the last three years. Although various ideas are being explored to upgrade or replace these facilities there are no resources identified and it is not clear how the service will improve in the short term. Recent plans to close public conveniences have highlighted the importance of these facilities to the public.
- 210 The council has a track record of commitment to recycling. All households have access to kerb side recycling, with a range of materials collected. A wide network of recycling bring sites supports this. As a result the council records high levels of recycling at 13 per cent (2001/02) placing it well above average for councils nationally.

- 211 Although this level of recycling has been static for a number of years the recent expansion of the number of materials collected has resulted in a rise to current rate of 14.6 per cent (un-audited 2003/04). In addition detailed and realistic action plans, funded by Project Integra and the department of environment, farming and rural affairs (DEFRA), mean that the council are likely to reach their national target of 22 per cent by the end of 2004. These include:
- ◆ the introduction of green waste recycling to all households in April 2004.
 - ◆ trialling glass recycling to 5,000 households in partnership with Rushmoor.
- 212 Overall residents' satisfaction with recycling services and standards of cleanliness is high with performance in the best 25 per cent of councils nationally in 2000/01. This is supported by a council survey in November 2002, which recorded that 71 per cent of residents were very satisfied with the council's recycling scheme.
- 213 The council is using partnerships effectively to address waste management objectives. It is part of the Project Integra partnership which aims to provide a long-term solution to waste management in Hampshire. This partnership includes all the district councils as well as the county and unitary councils. The partnership pools the resources of all councils in Hampshire to address issues such as recycling, waste collection and disposal and education.
- 214 The council keeps public spaces clean and tidy and it has recently taken action to be more responsive through a flexible approach to street cleaning and the introduction of three street care wardens. There is a joint waste management and street cleaning contract in place with an in-house contract with Hart Direct Services. This provides an integrated approach to waste management and street cleaning using resources more effectively to monitor and address street cleaning. Effective monitoring systems are in place.

Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?

- 215 The council's work on community safety is very effective. Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses and there is a very low need for service improvement.
- 216 Community safety is one of the emerging themes in the new community strategy and the community safety partnership is represented on the LSP. This emphasises the commitment of the council to this area of work.
- 217 Home Office figures show Hart is a safe place to live and levels of most crimes are falling. All Audit Commission crime and disorder performance indicators place Hart in the best 25 per cent nationally. Even so, the council is not complacent and works actively in partnership with others to address local and national crime issues.
- 218 The council is providing effective leadership within the community safety partnership 'Safer Hart'. Its contribution to implementing the strategy is clear. Of the six aims of the community safety strategy, it leads on one and takes a joint lead role on two others. Partners recognise the council's current commitment to addressing the crime and disorder concerns of the community.

- 219 The council has a good understanding of the crime and disorder concerns of the residents of Hart. A comprehensive audit has been undertaken by the partnership. This included an analysis of crime and antisocial behaviour, quality of life and community issues, and an assessment of the views and fears in the district. This information shaped the six key aims in the *Safer Hart Community Safety Strategy* (2002/05) which has been recognised as one of the best in the South East by the Government Office for the South East (GOSE.)
- 220 Action groups are in place and have established principal objectives for each of the six aims. The people involved in the action groups represent the community, key partners and statutory agencies. A detailed action plan is in place for 2003/04 and quarterly reports provide progress on projects. The plan will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.
- 221 Although the six aims in the three-year strategy are clear and realistic, they contain few clear measurable targets other than a small number of national indicators. It will therefore be difficult to measure the achievement of these aims or their impact on the community.
- 222 Crime levels are low in the district but the fear of crime is still a major concern for local people. The council is making significant efforts to address this issue through a number of innovative projects to help raise awareness and understanding. Good examples include a bus stop poster campaign, bogus caller initiative and neighbourhood warden scheme.
- 223 The partnership effectively targets its resources at key areas of high crime or at issues where communities have expressed concerns over community safety and this has resulted in improvements in incidents of crime and antisocial behaviour. Good examples include:
- ◆ installation of CCTV and a public awareness campaign at Fleet services to combat car crime;
 - ◆ the introduction of park patrols and CCTV to address 'hot spot' areas of crime and antisocial behaviour such as Oakely Park; and
 - ◆ targeted work in the Hersey Gardens area.
- 224 The council addresses community safety through the delivery of its services. Most staff recognise their contribution to improving the safety of local people. There are examples where the council and individual services have integrated crime reduction into their programmes and procedures. These include:
- ◆ community safety is addressed in all service reviews and through staff induction training;
 - ◆ the police architectural liaison officer advises on all new building developments; and
 - ◆ a range of crime diversionary and education projects for young people such as the junior citizen's fortnight, Fleet skate park and youth offender preparation work.

- 225 However, the council does not systematically incorporate community safety issues into the planning and delivery of all services. A number of service plans do not address objectives and actions from the community safety strategy. This lack of systematic mainstreaming in service planning could result in some services missing opportunities to contribute to community safety priorities in or between departments.
- 226 The council has developed some good partnership arrangements in order meet community safety objectives and this has increased capacity and helped attract external funding. Examples include:
- ◆ £216,000 from the Home office for an improved CCTV network in Fleet, which has received national accreditation; and
 - ◆ the young offender preparation work in conjunction with Wessex Youth Offending Team.

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

- 227 The council's contribution to activities for young people is mixed. Weaknesses outweigh strengths and consequently there is a high need for service improvement.
- 228 Providing these services is not one of the council's corporate priorities, but the lack of accessible facilities and opportunities impacts on the overall quality of life of the residents of Hart, to which the council have a responsibility.
- 229 Facilities and opportunities outside Fleet are limited. The council relies on parish and town councils to address this gap and delivery varies. Parish councils and young people themselves feel that the council provides limited services and facilities in these areas. Getting to these facilities is a major issue for young people and although the council provides transport for specific events, it has missed opportunities for involving and delivering services for young people as part of the Cango bus initiative.
- 230 The council's consultation with young people is improving. In the past, although some project-specific consultation was strong, a comprehensive assessment of needs had not taken place. The council also missed opportunities to get detailed information through, for example, youth clubs and its own initiatives. However, the council's scrutiny committee is now assessing youth provision in the district and is actively seeking the direct engagement of young people in this process.
- 231 The council has no corporate child protection policy, but it uses polices of partners effectively in the provision of specific projects in the district and has procedures in place for activities it delivers at leisure centres. Other council services, such as environmental health, and services delivered through voluntary organisations, are not provided with polices or training in child protection. The council has a duty of care to ensure children are protected through all its services and those it supports or promotes in the community.

- 232 The council provides a range of facilities and opportunities for children and young people in the district. The MORI residents' survey in 2001 highlighted facilities for young people as a priority for local people and an area for improvement. The council has recognised this and has made some progress in improving these services.
- 233 The quality of play areas is mixed. However, the council has a good understanding of the quality of play areas in the district and is investing £100,000 over the next year to ensure that its play areas meet European safety standards.
- 234 The council works effectively in partnership with a range of agencies and external funders to improve opportunities for young people. Significant achievements include:
- ◆ new playgrounds, informal recreation facilities and open space as part of housing developments;
 - ◆ funding and support for The Point Youth Centre and a skate park in Fleet in partnership with the Hampshire Youth Service; and
 - ◆ a range of initiatives such as the sports, cyber and music festivals (SCAMfest) and support for the Hook internet café and the youth citizens fortnight.
- 235 The council provides an extensive range of activities and programmes for young people through its leisure centres. These facilities are of good quality and the customer satisfaction with both the facilities and programmes is high. Centre programmes address the needs of the whole community through concessionary pricing as part of the 365 card.
- 236 The council uses its investments effectively through detailed monitoring of any funding it provides for youth provision. A service level agreement is in place for the Point Youth Centre. The agreement includes performance measures linked to the priorities of the council.

Summary of public space diagnostic assessment judgements and strengths / weaknesses

Area of focus	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
How well does the council contribute to the management of the physical environment?	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high quality of built environment • planning contributes to high quality design • improvements in planning performance • record of addressing sustainability • use of Section 106 agreements • service standards and customer response systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access for people with disabilities • no comprehensive needs assessment • missed opportunities to improve public space through planning • lack of systematic approach to environmental impact
Does the council help keep the locality clean?	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recycling levels, plans and investment • high satisfaction with recycling • streets and other public spaces clean and tidy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor performance on waste collection and slow to address • unclear how recycling targets for 2005/06 are to be achieved • limited education programme • public conveniences
Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?	a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crime levels low and falling • audit of community safety /crime • partnership working • targeting of resources • designing out of crime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • main streaming community safety in service planning
Does the council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership with youth service • opportunities for participation through leisure centres • investment in play areas • mechanisms for engaging young people developing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited provision of services in rural areas • no comprehensive needs analyses • no corporate approach to child protection
Public space diagnostic assessment judgement	B		

Scoring key:

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

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

Appendix 3 - Appointed auditor assessment

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

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

Scoring key:

1 = inadequate

2 = adequate overall, but some weaknesses that need to be addressed

3 = adequate

4 = good

Appendix 4 - Benefit Fraud Inspectorate assessment

238 The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) has undertaken the assessment in this appendix as part of the CPA process. The assessment covers two aspects, the current level of performance and the council's proven capacity to improve. Each assessment is measured on a five-point scale (poor, fair, fair to good, good and excellent).

Current performance

239 Overall, we found that Hart District Council's HB and CTB service is currently achieving a **fair** performance. However, the council's current performance demonstrates some strengths. These include:

- ◆ Verification Framework visits on all new claims;
- ◆ counter-fraud policy, which includes officer and Member declarations of interest;
- ◆ a freephone number to contact the Benefits service;
- ◆ fraud referrals are risk assessed; and
- ◆ Prosecution Panel provides auditable separation of investigation and prosecution decision roles.

240 However, there are a number of areas where Hart District Council needs to develop further to meet the BFI and Department for Work and Pensions' (the Department's) Performance Standards framework. These include:

- ◆ the Benefits service is not identified as a priority in the council's Corporate Plan;
- ◆ poor operational planning;
- ◆ no counter-fraud business plan, despite recommendation for such a plan in BFI inspection report - May 2000;
- ◆ lack of privacy for benefit drop-in callers;
- ◆ customer services performance information not recorded or monitored;
- ◆ the claim form does not follow the BFI model;
- ◆ Bottom quartile performance for Best Value Performance Indicators reported in 2001/02 and 2002/03;
- ◆ suspension since October 2002 of 10 per cent management checking;
- ◆ no formal monitoring mechanisms in place for service level agreements and these not reviewed or revised for several years;
- ◆ lack of publicity for fraud hotline; and
- ◆ overpayment letters do not comply with Schedule 6 to the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987.

Proven capacity to improve

- 241 We assessed Hart District Council's proven capacity to improve as **poor**. Hart District Council was able to demonstrate the following positive aspects:
- ◆ honest and critical appraisal of past and current level of performance documented in the Benefits service Best Value Review report;
 - ◆ positive response to the Department's intervention and Help Team assistance in improving poor performance;
 - ◆ external bids made for funding of improvements; and
 - ◆ individual benefit assessor performance information is monitored on a weekly basis.
- 242 However, the following areas led us to question the extent to which Hart District Council was able to prove its capacity to improve:
- ◆ superficial links made between service objectives and corporate strategic aims;
 - ◆ no vision and lack of shared values for the Benefits service;
 - ◆ council's performance management framework not fully implemented in Benefits service;
 - ◆ no track record of successfully managing change;
 - ◆ limited customer and other stakeholder consultation during Best Value Review process;
 - ◆ Best Value Performance Indicators showed a drop in performance between 2001/02 and 2002/03;
 - ◆ achievement of objectives set out in 1999 service plan reported as *very limited* in 2001 and many objectives still outstanding in 2003; and
 - ◆ poor performance against Strategic Management area of Performance Standards.

Appendix 5 - Framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment

- 243 This comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999. Local councils have a general duty under Section 3 of this Act to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions. Section 10 gives the Audit Commission the power to inspect councils' performance of the general duty of improvement.
- 244 The main elements of the assessment were:
- ◆ a self-assessment completed by the council;
 - ◆ accredited peer challenge to inform the council's self-assessment;
 - ◆ a corporate assessment of the council's overall effectiveness in supporting services to deliver improvements;
 - ◆ an assessment of the council's service delivery performance through two diagnostic assessments on:
 - ◆ management of public space;
 - ◆ contribution to developing a balanced housing market;
 - ◆ Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) assessment of benefit services;
 - ◆ appointed auditor assessments of performance on each of the main elements of the code of audit practice; and
 - ◆ audited performance indicators, inspection reports and plan assessments.
- 245 The assessment for Hart District Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 29 September to 3 October 2003.
- 246 This report has been discussed with the council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the council.