

## **CABINET – 24 May 2007**

### **Report of the Chief Executive**

#### ITEM 12 REPORTS FROM AUDIT COMMISSION

##### Purpose of Report

To agree management responses to issues raised in the Audit Commission Annual Audit & Inspection Letter 2005/06 and the Access to Services Inspection 2007.

##### Recommendation

1. To endorse the management responses set out in Tables 1-5 within this report.
2. To note that a further report on a response to Value for Money issues will be presented to Cabinet on 14 June.

##### Reason

To provide a response to the range of concerns raised in the various Audit Commission reports.

##### Policy Context

In the Corporate Plan improvement goals include “(8) Become an ‘Excellent Council’ by Continually improving the way we do business, setting challenging but realistic targets and effectively monitoring their performance.” and “(9) Deliver value for money on all Council services”

##### Background

The Annual Audit & Inspection Letter, attached as Appendix 1, was published at the end of March at the start of the election period. This letter refers in the main to the state of the Council in 2005/06. Also attached as Appendices 2 and 3 are the Use of Resources Judgement and the ‘Direction of Travel Tool’ - a report on the basket of performance indicators upon which the Direction of Travel statement is based.

The Access to Services inspection was conducted in February 2007 and the report agreed in April during the election period. The final report was delayed by election ‘purdah’ and only published on Monday, 14 May. It is attached as Appendix 4.

The purpose in bringing these two reports to Cabinet together is that they both highlight similar concerns over the Council’s approach to Value for Money. The proposed response, once endorsed, will be examined alongside the reports at Performance & Audit Scrutiny Committee on 29 May, 2007.

##### Annual Audit & Inspection Letter

The Annual Audit & Inspection Letter goes beyond a financial audit and picks up broader areas of performance. In doing so the timetable for audits of the various elements has pushed the date at which it is available back to a time nearly twelve months after the close of the period to which it refers. There is also a certain inconsistency in treatment as some elements, those concerning accounts, and to a large extent ‘Use of Resources’, are based quite tightly on the period, in this case

2005/06. The Direction of Travel element, however, where the fieldwork is done before December, does pick up developments from 2006/07.

In terms of feedback for improvement this poses some difficulties as, for instance, the Use of Resources judgement for 2006/07 which will be received next year has more or less been determined by the time this one is published. Nevertheless the Council has already been aware of many of the areas highlighted in the inspection letter and been undertaking remedial action. The response to the Audit Letter below is a mixture of things already done, and those proposed.

The summary of the letter is that:

“The Council is making improvements at a similar rate to other council's although against its priority areas the rate of improvement is not consistent, and the level of top performing services is below average. The Council is building capacity for future improvements and plans are generally robust. However there does need to be a greater emphasis on outcome targets in improvement planning.”

It then goes on to give an unqualified opinion on the accounts and suggest three headline areas for councillors attention as set out in the following table:

**Table I – Areas for Members Attention**

Maintaining the leadership, direction and commitment towards improving service provision across all service areas and ensuring improvement plans are delivered;	This is an ongoing responsibility which is supported in Charnwood through the allocation of Lead Member roles within the Cabinet, and on the Project Boards for Key Projects, as described in a paper elsewhere on this agenda, as well as through the Scrutiny arrangements.
Furthering efforts to improve relations with other two tier councils in Leicestershire in pursuit of service improvements and cost efficiencies	This is primarily pursued through the 'Shared Services' Key Project, both within and outside Leicestershire.
Focussing on the areas for improvement highlighted by the appointed auditor in respect of Use of Resources	These are reported more fully below and the specific area of Value for Money is addressed at the end of this report.

It should be remembered that the production of the letter, and the language used is done within a strict set of rules to enable transparency and comparability between Councils – and also possibly to provide a defence in the event of any legal challenge as did occur under CPA. The precise meaning of the headline summary is clearer in the examination of the detail below.

The letter can be considered in its four components:

- 1) the financial accounts
- 2) the Use of Resources judgement
- 3) the basket of Performance Indicators
- 4) The Direction of Travel assessment

#### *Financial Accounts*

As indicated above, “the appointed auditor was again able to give an unqualified opinion on the Council's 2005/06 financial statements. This was the first year in

which the appointed auditor has had to give a separate opinion on the Council's use of resources. In all significant respects, Charnwood Borough Council made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2006.”

No particular response is required on this other than points made in the Use of Resources judgement.

### *Use of Resources*

The Use of Resources judgement is made up of five components. Charnwood has again scored a 2 (adequate). The score on Financial Reporting has moved to a 3, but those for Financial Standing and Financial Control remained at a 2. It is believed that measures have been put into place in 2006/07 which will result in a score of 3 overall. Value for Money, however, continues to be a problem.

The report is reproduced in Appendix 2 and provides information on movement of each of the sub components. Scoring operates on a ‘hurdle’ system, and missing one component of the requirements for a level 3 mean that the level is missed. The areas for consideration have been extracted in the table below and the management response is indicated – with the exception of Value for Money which is discussed further at the end of this report.

**Table 2 – Areas for Consideration from Use of Resources**

<b>Financial Reporting</b>	
· The publication of annual reports to become embedded, and;	This has been addressed by the Director of Change Management in the publication of the Annual Report / Best Value Performance Plan
· Continue to improve the quality of working papers to support the financial statements.	Ongoing by the Head of Financial Services
<b>Financial Management</b>	
· Describe in financial terms joint plans with partners within the MTFS;	To be addressed in the forthcoming annual review of the Financial Strategy by the Deputy Chief Executive.
· The financial performance of significant partnerships to be regularly reviewed, linked to outputs, and the results shared with partners and acted upon;	This is an area to be further developed jointly by the Deputy Chief Executive and the Director of Partnerships & Customer Services
· Further development of performance indicators and benchmarking to describe and evaluate how the asset base contributes to the achievement of corporate and service objectives, and	To be addressed in the forthcoming annual review of the Property Strategy by the Deputy Chief Executive.
· Actively communicate the results of performance measurements and benchmarking to stakeholders.	In part, this has been addressed by the Director of Change Management in the publication of the Annual Report / Best Value Performance Plan, but further work is required by all service directors in dealing with user and focus groups.
<b>Financial Standing</b>	

· Further develop the use of monitoring information that evaluates the effectiveness of debt recovery actions, associated costs, and the cost of not recovering debt.	This has already been addressed by the Deputy Chief Executive in 2006/07.
<b>Financial Control</b>	
· Further progress in the specific identification of the risks in relation to significant partnerships and provide for assurances about the management of those risks, and;	This is being addressed by the Director of Partnerships & Customer Services in the development of the Partnership Management Framework.
· Effective communication of the counter-fraud and corruption and whistle-blowing policies.	This has already been addressed by the Director of Risk Management in 2006/07.
<b>Value for Money</b>	
· For 2007/08 the Council should consider and gather evidence of how the benchmarking exercise has been used to inform decision making, for example how cost comparisons to other 'near neighbour' councils has been considered through the service delivery planning process.	Considered further below
· Evidence to show improvements in housing services through implementation of the housing inspection recommendations.	This was already demonstrated to the (separate) Direction of Travel inspector and is referenced in the letter
· The Council should evidence how it demonstrates that equity across the community has been considered during the decision making process	Considered further below
· How VFM is incorporated in target setting for service delivery and individual officers	Considered further below
· The capital outturn report to Cabinet June 2006 included details of slippage of 16%. For 2006/07 the Council should consider how the improved monitoring procedures are leading to an improvement in the management of the capital programme.	Considered further below
· Evidence of the outcome of consultation with the community. How have the views of the community shaped service delivery?	Considered further below
· Procurement decisions can demonstrate VFM both through cost savings and improved service.	Considered further below

### *Performance Indicators*

Attached as Appendix 3 is the Direction of Travel Tool which shows that improvement over the basket of indicators is slightly above the all District average, at 59% as opposed to the average of 57.4%-58.6%. The percentage of indicators in the top quartile is, however, only 18% against an all District average of 31%.

It should be pointed out that the quartile comparison is against other unitaries as well as districts – mathematically the average in the top quartile would always be 25% were it only an intra district comparison. The basket of indicators needs to be examined, and out of 38 indicators 7 are crime related. The characteristics of a large district like Charnwood tend to be similar to that of unitaries in this respect.

The headline comments are very much based on the arithmetic calculation across this basket of indicators.

The following table notes progress for the worst quartile indicators in 2007/08 and current actions. A better report on this basket of indicators, however, will rely on achievement of more top quartile performance as well. The comparative figures for 2007/08 are unaudited data taken from the year end performance report to be presented to Performance & Audit Scrutiny Committee on 29 May 2007.

**Table 3 – Response on ‘Worst Quartile’ Performance Indicators**

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>05/06</i>	<i>06/07</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Ombudsman: average number of days to respond to complaints	37 days	27 days	Second quartile performance, but the Ombudsman’s ‘best’ category is simply ‘<= 28 days’ so falls within that.
BVPI 8 Percentage of invoices paid by agreed date or within 30 days	75%	92%	Additional efforts being applied from new year with 96% achieved in April 07 which, if maintained, would be top quartile by 05/06 standards
BVPI 79b ii Housing Benefit overpayments recovered as a percentage of the total amount of HB overpayment debt.	10.28%	25.95%	Would still rank in third quartile. Further improvement required.
Ratio of percentage of top 5% of earners who are women (BVPI 11a) to percentage of women in the population	40	48	Would still rank in third quartile. Further improvement required
CDRP: Domestic burglaries per 1,000 households	14.86	19.08	Continues to deteriorate. Issues being addressed in ‘Reducing Crime in Charnwood’ Key Project with Police, GOEM, Home Office & County Council.
CDRP: Robberies per 1,000 Persons	0.92	0.84	Marginal improvement but remains in worst quartile. Issues being addressed in ‘Reducing Crime in Charnwood’ Key Project with Police, GOEM, Home Office & County Council.
CDRP: Violence against the person per 1000 persons	21.35	20.77	Marginal improvement but remains in worst quartile. Issues being addressed in ‘Reducing Crime in Charnwood’ Key Project with Police, GOEM, Home Office & County Council.

*Direction of Travel*

The direction of travel assessment as a whole ranges across a wider group of indicators and specifically notes progress against improvement plans from previous inspections. Overall judgements are mixed, but the remarks made separately by the Audit Commission Relationship Manager was that the Council has ‘turned the corner’. Before setting out the management response to areas of concern it would be useful to highlight some positive points made in the letter:

- Recycling is in the top quartile of performance
- Charnwood is continuing to improve in its priority area of leisure & culture
- Customer services is meeting most of its key targets and satisfaction with the Customer Service Centre is high
- Website usage is significantly increasing

- The Council has progressed to level 2 of the equality standard – above the national average
- The Council has responded well to the Housing Inspection and there are significant improvements in the repairs service.
- Neighbourhood management and tenant involvement is improving.
- Charnwood is building significant capacity to improve priority areas through ICT investment and project management support.
- The Council was on course for achieving most of its targets
- Partnership working is strong with neighbouring districts and local parishes and the council needs now to reinforce its efforts to improve leadership relations with other two tier councils in Leicestershire

The last point of course indicating an area for improvement as well. Other areas for improvement, with the proposed management response, are set out in the following table. These begin with the three headline areas for improvement.

**Table 4 – Areas for Improvement from Direction of Travel**

Cleanliness of streets has not improved and is below the national median.	Performance deteriorated further in 06/07 and remedial action is described further in a report appearing elsewhere on this agenda.
The reduction in waste to landfill is small and cost of waste collection is comparatively high.	The first point is being addressed in the 'Reduce Waste to Landfill' key project. The second is a longer term issue, being addressed mainly through procurement.
Deterioration of some processing times in benefits service	Unaudited data for 06/07 has indicated improvements across the board, with most targets being met. Improvement of performance of this service will be an important consideration within the 'Shared Services' key project where it figures as a major component.
In some key priority areas local performance indicators and subsequent targets are not fully developed within the BVPP and service plans particularly cultural services and customer services	This is an area to be addressed during the course of the Service Delivery Plan preparation in 07/08 – particularly in the identified services.
Some priority targets are not being met in environment, housing, crime, and benefits.	From 06/07 Action Plans are developed for all indicators which are off target. These are reviewed by the SMT and Lead Members and reported to Performance & Audit Scrutiny Committee.

### Access to Services

The Council was inspected in February 2007 and was judged to be a fair service with promising prospects for improvement. In the words of the report:

“The service is a fair, one-star service because:

- Access arrangements for local people are improving, for example physical access to buildings is good with 98 per cent of Council public buildings fully DDA2 compliant.

- The majority of Council services can be accessed through the Customer Contact Centre, Customer Service Centre, Connect Service Shop, Joint Help Points and via the website, and if required, there is access to signers, translators and interpreters.
- Publicity to promote Council services is effective. There is high resident awareness of the Council and of the services they provide.
- There is generally a range of high quality information in appropriate locations and formats informing local people of the services available to them.
- There is consistent application of equalities and diversity considerations in practice.
- Mystery shopping exercises show user experience is good.
- Satisfaction with the way complaints are handled is good.

However:

- The approach to diversity and engagement is still developing as it does not include all groups such as mid age range or local community groups.
- Consultation and engagement with some sections of the community and traditionally hard to reach groups is limited thereby restricting the Council's understanding of their access needs and preferences.
- Access to some services is limited, eg planning.
- There is some poor quality of service when enquiries are passed from the first point of contact to individual departments.
- Service standards are not consistently informed by users to ensure their needs are met.
- Value for money in access to services is underdeveloped.

The Council's prospects for improving access to its services are promising because:

- It has a track record of improvements to the reception area in its Southfields office; to its website; and in national performance indicators.
- There is a clear vision for access to services, cascading from the corporate plan, and a short-term improvement plan.
- The integrated planning process ensures that service plans and the budgets are produced at the same time.
- There is visible councillor and officer leadership for access to services and the political will to deliver improved access.
- It has a robust performance management framework with scorecards to monitor progress against key initiatives.
- There is commitment to training and development for both councillors and staff: the Charnwood Academy, available to all on the intranet, provides a key training resource.
- It has the financial resources to deliver improvements.

However:

- The aims for customer access to services are not specific or stretching and the Council does not give a timescale for achieving these.
- Delivery plans are short-term, looking only at the current year: there are no medium or long term delivery plans, or milestones to show progress towards delivering the vision.
- There is no robust framework to drive improvements in value for money.
- Sickness absence levels are above average, reducing Council capacity to deliver improvements.”

There are other aspects of the report to note which are not clear from the summary reproduced above, or directly addressed in the high level recommendations below:

- A particular problem contributing to the 'fair' assessment was also the lack of coverage of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, and consequently limitation on the range of services provided at first point of contact in the Customer Contact & Service Centres. This was due to delays necessary to replace the previous, inadequate system with a new system which has successfully gone live this month. The report acknowledges this and also commended the Council for taking the difficult decision to replace the relatively new system which underpinned the original contact centre. There is a key project which concentrates on extending coverage of CRM across all Council services over the next three years.
- The report refers specifically to the lack of availability of planning officers from 9am to 2pm. Arrangements are being made to use the new CRM system and workflows to provide a response in this period and in particular to assist towns and parishes in responding to consultations.
- Difficulties in front office / back office handover of cases are currently being investigated to remove the problems identified in the report.
- As acknowledged by the report, the key project on Reducing Sickness Absence succeeded last year in reducing sickness from 13 days per employee to 10 days last year. In the first five weeks of this year the fall has continued to an annual rate of 8 days, although it must be recognised that seasonally this is a period of low sickness absence.

There are three recommendations for improvement and the proposed response is as follows:

**Table 5 – Main Recommendations on Access to Services**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Management Response</b>
<p><i><b>R1</b> Extend and improve the Council's approach to consultation and engagement by building on the work undertaken to date and engaging with:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>users and non-users;</i></li> <li>• <i>marginalised groups; and</i></li> <li>• <i>local community groups.</i></li> </ul> <p>The expected benefits of this recommendation are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council services will be better informed by an accurate and complete assessment of needs; and</li> <li>• an inclusive service which is informed by all residents and users.</li> </ul> <p>The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs.</p> <p>This should be implemented by <b>September 2007</b>.</p>	<p>As the recommendation implies, this is an extension of work which is already in progress and will be addressed in detail within the 'Reputations' Key Project.</p>
<p><i><b>R2</b> Establish a systematic approach to managing and improving value for money for access to services' functions by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>using comparative data already collected, supplemented where necessary, to identify areas where performance is low and/or high cost</i></li> </ul>	<p>This is described in the Value for Money section below.</p>

<p><i>compared to that achieved by other councils; and challenging the reasons for this;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>establishing robust cost and efficiency indicators; and</i></li> <li>• <i>maximising opportunities for benchmarking to improve understanding of the relative quality and effectiveness of the revenues and benefits contact centre, and to learn from the experiences of other councils.</i></li> </ul> <p>The expected benefits of this recommendation are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improved cost effectiveness of the service;</li> <li>• raised awareness of value for money within the service and externally; and</li> <li>• enhanced capacity to target priorities and deliver benefits for users.</li> </ul> <p>The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low net costs following an initial investment.</p> <p>This should be implemented by <b>March 2008</b>.</p>	
<p><b>R3</b> <i>Develop short, medium and long term action plans to deliver access to services strategies by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>including clear aims, objectives, milestones and resourced improvements over the next three to five years.</i></li> </ul> <p>The expected benefits of this recommendation are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to provide a more coherent and cohesive strategic approach to access to services; and</li> <li>• greater clarity and transparency of what the Council aims to achieve by improving access to services for staff, partners and other stakeholders</li> </ul> <p>The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs.</p> <p>This should be implemented by <b>July 2007</b>.</p>	<p>Project plans within Charnwood have hitherto been largely focussed on 1 year achievement, even where they were effectively 'rolling projects'.</p> <p>The Director of Change Management, through the Change Project Support Unit, is currently reviewing project plans to ensure that their documentation fills in the gaps in the middle ground to provide a base line for this years Service Delivery Planning process.</p>

### Value for Money

A common thread between these two reports is the lack of progress on Value for Money within the Council. When the Value for Money issues were considered in the last Annual Audit and Inspection Letter, Cabinet allocated £25,000 from the Reinvestment Reserve to fund temporary support to develop systems for the analysis of unit costs and external benchmarking. This base data was collected and is recognised in the positive comments within the Direction of Travel statement "The Council is continuing to develop its awareness of value for money. It has undertaken a benchmarking exercise based on the Audit Commission value for

money profiles. Unit cost information has been compared to performance data to inform the 2007/08 service delivery plans”

The Council has not, however, been able to develop the systems to effectively internalise the collection and use of this data, and otherwise pursue Value for Money across the range of its services. The Access to Services inspection considered the Council’s approach to Value for Money to be ‘underdeveloped’, and there was ‘no robust framework to drive improvements in value for money.’ The Council does not have, internally, the resources to improve on this in the time frame needed, and the report further recognises that this will require an initial investment which will recoup the outlay through increased efficiency.

The Council is pursuing significant value for money initiatives, in particular the joint shared services project with Rushcliffe Borough Council. Rushcliffe currently scores 3’s on all aspects of Use of Resources, including Value for Money and is intending that our joint project will lift it to a score of 4 out of 4. Nonetheless it is the systematic pursuit of Value for Money which realise the efficiencies necessary to deliver services in what is expected to be an increasingly harsh financial settlement for next year.

Plans are currently being drawn up on how the Public Service Agreement Performance Reward Grant from the Department for Communities and Local Government might be used for this purpose. Approximately £134,000 – half capital and half revenue - was received at the end of last year and was not taken into account in the budget process. More detailed proposals will be put forward when the outturn from the financial year is better known.

#### Financial Implications

There are no specific financial implications to this report which are not addressed elsewhere in financial arrangements for Key Projects, or in the case of Value for Money, to be addressed in a future report.

#### Risk Management

Risk Identified	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Management Actions Planned
Failing to address concerns highlighted by the various reports leading to a lack of improvement in services and damage to the Council’s reputation	L	H	The actions are as documented in Tables 1-5
Failure to address Value for Money issues raised in these reports leading to possible need to reduce services to remain within budget	M	H	To be the subject of a future report.

Key Decision: Yes

Background Papers: Annual Audit & Inspection Letter – Cabinet Report 18 May 06  
Performance Review Programme – Cabinet Report 18 May 06  
Audit Commission publications attached as appendices

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# Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

**Charnwood Borough Council**

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

### **Status of our reports**

This report provides an overall summary of the Audit Commission's assessment of the Council, drawing on audit, inspection and performance assessment work and is prepared by your Relationship Manager.

In this report, the Commission summarises findings and conclusions from the statutory audit, which have previously been reported to you by your appointed auditor. Appointed auditors act separately from the Commission and, in meeting their statutory responsibilities, are required to exercise their professional judgement independently of the Commission (and the audited body). The findings and conclusions therefore remain those of the appointed auditor and should be considered within the context of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission.

Reports prepared by appointed auditors are:

- prepared in the context of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission; and
- addressed to members or officers and prepared for the sole use of the audited body; no responsibility is taken by auditors to any member or officer in their individual capacity, or to any third party.

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## Our overall summary

- 1 This report provides an overall summary of the Audit Commission's assessment of the Council. It draws on the findings and conclusions from the audit of the Council and from any inspections that have been undertaken in the last year. The letter includes our review of how well the Council has progressed (our Direction of Travel report) and the auditor's assessment of how well the Council has managed its finances (the Use of Resources scores). These latter components will be an important feed into any future decision regarding the potential for a rescoring the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) category.
- 2 The report is addressed to the Council, in particular it has been written for councillors, but is available as a public document for stakeholders, including members of the community served by the Council.

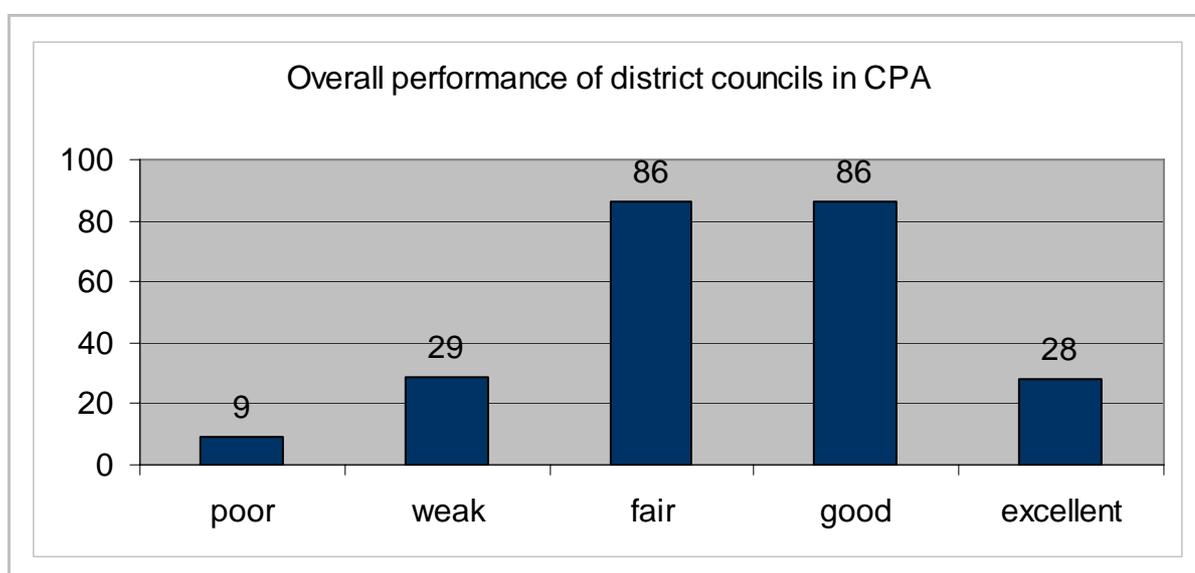
## Main messages for the Council

- 3 The Council is making improvements at a similar rate to other council's although against its priority areas the rate of improvement is not consistent, and the level of top performing services is below average. The Council is building capacity for future improvements and plans are generally robust. However there does need to be a greater emphasis on outcome targets in improvement planning.
- 4 The appointed auditor was again able to give an unqualified opinion on the Council's 2005/06 financial statements. This was the first year in which the appointed auditor has had to give a separate opinion on the Council's use of resources. In all significant respects, Charnwood Borough Council made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2006.
- 5 The Council should focus efforts on improving performance in the areas set out below. Members have a key part to play, in this respect, in:
  - maintaining the leadership, direction and commitment towards improving service provision across all service areas and ensuring improvement plans are delivered;
  - furthering efforts to improve relations with other two tier councils in Leicestershire in pursuit of service improvements and cost efficiencies; and
  - focussing on the areas for improvement highlighted by the appointed auditor in respect of Use of Resources.

## How is Charnwood Borough Council performing?

- 6 Charnwood Borough Council was assessed as Fair in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment carried out in 2004. These assessments have been completed in all district councils and we are now starting to update these assessments, through an updated corporate assessment, in councils where there is evidence of change. The following chart is the latest position across all district councils.

**Figure 1 Overall performance of district councils in CPA**



Source: Audit Commission

## The improvement since last year - our Direction of Travel report

### What evidence is there of the Council improving outcomes?

- 7 Charnwood Borough Council's current priorities are based on an economically prosperous environment; a clean, safe and healthy and sustainable environment; leisure and cultural opportunities for all; decent homes and neighbourhoods; and working towards becoming an excellent council. This report reflects the Council's progress in 2005/06 against key aspects of these priorities.

## 6 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter | How is Charnwood Borough Council performing?

- 8 The Council's rate of progress is similar to other councils. Against an Audit Commission basket of Performance Indicators (PIs) 59 per cent improved in 2005/06. However the proportion of PIs in the top 25 percent nationally is below average.
- 9 The Council has a mixed picture of improvement within its environment priority. Recycling is continuing to improve and is amongst the top 25 per cent of councils nationally, as a result of a programme of education campaigns. The Council collects comparatively low levels of waste but there was only a small reduction of waste to landfill of 0.4 per cent against previous year and the cost of collection is comparatively high. Cleanliness has not improved and is below the national median despite the Council's efforts to focus on the town centre. Planning applications are being processed marginally more quickly.
- 10 The Council continues to improve its priority area of leisure and culture. In 2006 its improvements include the refurbishment of Charnwood Leisure Centre and enhancements to the town hall which are beginning to result in increased usage. It has also putting in place initiatives to address social inclusion. For example a Sports Link officer was appointed to deliver a project aimed at young people to improve access and conflict resolution and reduction in deprived areas in north of the borough. The Council also works in partnership with Sure Start to deliver "early years" physical activity in targeted areas. Through its cultural services the Council is delivering and enabling programmes to provide opportunities for disadvantaged groups.
- 11 The Council's progress in improving customer services is mixed. It is meeting most of its key targets for customer services and un-audited data for 2006/07 indicates high levels of satisfaction with its service centre. ICT access has improved; the Council has moved to 100 per cent on the e-government performance indicator and un-audited data shows website usage is significantly increasing. However the performance of the benefits service showed some deterioration in 2005/06 including processing times although overall, indicators are above the national median. Un-audited 2006/07 data indicates that the Council has improved to level 2 of the equality standard indicator, above the national average.
- 12 A 2006 Audit Commission Indicative ALMO inspection assessed the Council's current housing landlord service as being "poor". Weaknesses were identified in the standard of customer services, poor response times to repairs, lack of investment and limited resident involvement. 2005/06 performance indicators for housing are overall similar to other authorities. The Council has responded well to the inspection and un-audited data for 2006/07 shows significant improvements to the repairs service. Neighbourhood management is being improved through three community strategy support officers and also a more active approach to tenant relations.
- 13 The Council is continuing to develop its awareness of value for money. It has undertaken a benchmarking exercise based on the Audit Commission value for money profiles. Unit cost information has been compared to performance data to inform the 2007/08 service delivery plans.

## How much progress is being made to implement improvement plans to sustain future improvement?

- 14 The Council's improvements plans are generally robust but there is a lack of outcome targets for some priorities. The "Charnwood Scorecard" is informed by the key strategic documents and identifies the authority's main goals. The service delivery planning process incorporates an assessment of resources required to deliver the plans. Each plan is assessed by a panel of senior officers in the "star chamber" to ensure a focus on priorities. However there are key priorities where local performance indicators and subsequent targets are not fully developed within the BVPP and service plans particularly cultural services and customer services.
- 15 Improvement plans are ambitious with challenging targets although over 50 per cent of targets were missed in the 2005/06 BVPP particularly in the economic and environment priority areas. However the Council is achieving most of its 2006/07 targets at quarter 3 according to un-audited data but some priority targets are not being met in environment, housing, crime, and benefits. Improvements plans whilst being challenging have not always been deliverable.
- 16 The Council is building significant capacity to enable it to improve priority areas. Within housing it has completed its ALMO bid and its housing strategy is "fit for purpose". It has also progressed on the procurement of a new housing management ICT system with a view to transforming repairs and maintenance. The Council has developed a new customer services strategy and, to deliver this, is procuring a corporate customer relationship management ICT system. To assist with key projects and business re-processing the Council has installed a new project management team. Partnership working is strong with neighbouring districts and local parishes and the council needs now to reinforce its efforts to improve leadership relations with other two tier councils in Leicestershire.

## Service inspections

Apart from the Indicative ALMO inspection referred to above no other service inspections have been completed since our last annual audit and inspection letter.

## Financial management and value for money

- 17 Your appointed auditor has reported to Finance and Audit Select Committee on 12 September 2006 under International Standard on Auditing (ISA) 260 on the issues arising from the 2005/06 audit and has provided:
- an unqualified opinion on your accounts;
  - an opinion on the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, which were deemed to be adequate; and
  - a report on the Best Value Performance Plan confirming that the Plan has been audited and that there were no issues arising.
- 18 In respect of the 2005/06 financial accounts, your appointed auditor has reported that:
- there were no unadjusted misstatements that needed to be brought to the attention of Members;
  - there were no material weaknesses noted in the Council's accounting and internal control systems during the 2005/06 audit;
  - the presentation of the 2005/06 final accounts and standard of working papers to support underlying transactions incorporated within the 2005/06 accounts were of an appropriate standard; and
  - there were no matters of irregular expenditure, fraud or misconduct, or poor standards of financial integrity that we need to bring to your attention.
- 19 The findings of the auditor are an important component of the CPA framework described above. In particular the Use of Resources score is derived from the assessments made by the auditor in the following areas:
- Financial Reporting (including the preparation of the accounts of the Council and the way these are presented to the public).
  - Financial Management (including how the financial management is integrated with strategy to support Council priorities).
  - Financial Standing (including the strength of the Council's financial position).
  - Internal Control (including how effectively the Council maintains proper stewardship and control of its finances).
  - Value for Money (including an assessment of how well the Council balances the costs and quality of its services).
- 20 For the purposes of the CPA your auditor has assessed the Council's arrangements for use of resources in these five areas as follows:

**Table 1**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
Financial reporting	3 out of 4
Financial management	3 out of 4
Financial standing	2 out of 4
Internal control	2 out of 4
Value for money	2 out of 4
Overall assessment of the Audit Commission	2 out of 4

*(Note: 1=lowest, 4=highest)*

- 21** The appointed auditor has noted that the Council has improved its score in respect of Financial Reporting from a '2' to a '3' and that developments have been seen in a number of areas in comparison to the previous year. No scores have been lower than in the prior year. For the Council to move towards an overall score of 3, improvement the areas currently at level 2 will need to be demonstrated and embedded.
- 22** With regard to the Authority's financial position, recent reports submitted to Members (January 2007) indicate that the Authority is continuing to manage its financial position prudently in 2006/07. The General Fund revenue budget position at the end of November 2006 was £1.1 million under-spent against the profiled budget. Reserves and balances at 31 March 2007 are budgeted to be £1.4 million. Looking forward, a budget requirement of £17.7 million net expenditure for 2007/08 is identified and a 2.5 per cent increase in the Council's element of Council Tax is proposed.
- 23** Charnwood Borough Council faces ongoing budget pressures and the challenges of responding to and managing them. In common with most other local authorities, the Council will be required to continue to exercise a high degree of financial management in the years ahead to ensure these pressures are managed without an adverse impact upon service delivery.

## Conclusion

- 24 This letter has been discussed and agreed with the Chief Executive. A copy of the letter will be presented at the Cabinet on 24 May 2007.
- 25 The Council has taken a positive and constructive approach to our audit and inspection I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the Council's assistance and co-operation.

## Availability of this letter

- 26 This letter will be published on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk), and also on the Council's website.

Nigel Toms

Relationship Manager

# Charnwood Borough Council

## CPA Use of Resources – assessment results

Brian Hayes  
Chief Executive  
Charnwood Borough Council  
Southfields  
LE11 2TU

March 2007

Dear Brian

**CPA – Use of Resources – assessment results**

We are pleased to present the summary results of our assessment of the Council's use of resources. We hope that the information contained in this report provides a useful source of reference.

Yours sincerely

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

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**Code of Audit Practice and Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and of Audited Bodies**

*In March 2005 the Audit Commission issued a revised version of the ‘Statement of responsibilities of auditors and of audited bodies’. It is available from the Chief Executive of each audited body. The purpose of the statement is to assist auditors and audited bodies by explaining where the responsibilities of auditors begin and end and what is to be expected of the audited body in certain areas. Our reports and management letters are prepared in the context of this Statement. Reports and letters prepared by appointed auditors and addressed to members or officers are prepared for the sole use of the audited body and no responsibility is taken by auditors to any Member or officer in their individual capacity or to any third party.*

# Executive Summary

## **Use of Resources assessment**

This report presents the results of the 2005/06 review of use of resources at Charnwood Borough Council (the Council). As the Audit Commission's appointed auditor to the Council, we undertook this review during the period October 2006 – January 2007, as part of our responsibility to examine the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's use of resources, in accordance with the Commission's Code of Audit Practice and Standing Guidance for Auditors.

We have completed our review in accordance with the methodology and guidance issued by the Audit Commission (the Commission). The results have been subject to internal and national quality assurance arrangements, designed to ensure compliance with the methodology and guidance, and to promote consistency of assessment between appointed auditors.

This report summarises the results of the assessment. It also highlights areas for improvement based on the criteria issued by the Commission.

## **Approach and scoring**

We assessed the Council's arrangements against a series of Key Lines of Enquiry (KLoEs) grouped into the following five areas.

- Financial Reporting
- Financial Management
- Financial Standing
- Internal Control
- Value for Money

KLoEs are scored as follows:

- 1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance;
- 2 – only at minimum requirements – adequate performance
- 3 – consistently above minimum requirements –performing well; or
- 4 – well above minimum requirements –performing strongly.

The table below summarises the results of our use of resources assessment in 2006.

<b>Financial Reporting</b>		<b>Score</b>
1	How good are the Council's financial accounting and reporting arrangements?	<b>3</b>
<b>Financial Management</b>		
2	How well does the Council plan and manage its finances?	<b>3</b>
<b>Financial Standing</b>		
3	How well does the Council safeguard its financial standing?	<b>2</b>
<b>Internal Control</b>		
4	How well does the Council's internal control environment enable it to manage its significant business risks?	<b>2</b>
<b>Value for Money</b>		
5	Does the Council achieve value for money and does it manage and improve value for money?	<b>2</b>

A summary of our key findings is included in the main body of this report. A comparison between the individual KLoE scores in 2005 and 2006 is included in Appendix 1 to this report.

# Summary of key findings and areas for consideration

## 1 - Financial Reporting

### How good are the council's financial accounting and reporting arrangements?

#### Overview

The overall performance of the Council for financial reporting is good. The Council has continued to produce accounts within the required deadlines and there have been no material errors or areas of non-compliance with the SORP. The quality of working papers to support fixed asset disclosures was notably improved compared to the previous year and we were able to issue an unqualified opinion on the financial statements. External accountability has again been generally good and the Council's web-site is effectively used to publish key documents. Charnwood have produced an annual report containing summary accounts, which is published on the Council's website and elsewhere in a number of formats.

#### Key Lines of Enquiry

- The Council produces annual accounts in accordance with relevant standards and timetables, supported by comprehensive working papers
- The Council promotes external accountability.

3  
3

#### Areas for consideration

- The publication of annual reports to become embedded, and;
- Continue to improve the quality of working papers to support the financial statements.

## 2 - Financial Management

### How well does the council plan and manage its finances?

3

#### Overview

A medium term financial strategy (MTFS) has been approved by Cabinet for consultation by joint plans with partners will be incorporated into it as part of the consultation process. The corporate objectives set out in the Corporate Plan are cascaded into services through the service delivery planning process.

No significant departmental over or under-spends were identified during 2006/06. The Council has an up to date asset management plan that details existing asset management arrangements and outcomes. There is an annual programme of planned maintenance based on a rolling programme of property surveys.

Going forward, the Council will need to ensure it is compliant with KLoE criteria that are currently non-bold, but which may become bold in future years.

#### Key Lines of Enquiry

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • The council's medium-term financial strategy, budgets and capital programme are soundly based and designed to deliver its strategic priorities | 3 |
| • The council manages performance against budgets  | 3 |
| • The council manages its asset base.  | 3 |

#### Areas for consideration

- Describe in financial terms joint plans with partners within the MTFS;
- The financial performance of significant partnerships to be regularly reviewed, linked to outputs, and the results shared with partners and acted upon;
- Further development of performance indicators and benchmarking to describe and evaluate how the asset base contributes to the achievement of corporate and service objectives, and;
- Actively communicate the results of performance measurements and benchmarking to stakeholders.

### 3 - Financial Standing

How well does the council safeguard its financial standing?

2

#### Overview

Charnwood Borough Council has maintained spending within its overall budget and without significant unexpected overspends. The policy for reserves and balances is set out within the MTFS and approved annually by Members. There is scope to develop the use of monitoring information that evaluates the effectiveness of debt recovery actions, associated costs, and the cost of not recovering debt.

#### Key Lines of Enquiry

- The council manages its spending within the available resources

2

#### Areas for consideration

- Further develop the use of monitoring information that evaluates the effectiveness of debt recovery actions, associated costs, and the cost of not recovering debt.

#### 4 - Internal Control

How well does the council's internal control environment enable it to manage its significant business risks?

2

##### Overview

Internal control arrangements are adequate and developments have been noted in risk management. The risk management process is reviewed and updated regularly and is beginning to consider in more detail the risks in relation to significant partnerships. Staff are given relevant training and guidance to enable them to take responsibility for managing risk within their own working environment. Members with specific responsibility for corporate risk management receive reports on a regular basis and take appropriate action to ensure that corporate business risks are being actively managed. There is an assurance framework in place which provides members with information to support the Statement on Internal Control.

##### Key Lines of Enquiry

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • The council manages its significant business risks.  | 2 |
| • The council has arrangements in place to maintain a sound system of internal control   | 3 |
| • The council has arrangements in place that are designed to promote and ensure probity and propriety in the conduct of its business | 2 |

##### Areas for consideration

- Further progress in the specific identification of the risks in relation to significant partnerships and provide for assurances about the management of those risks, and;
- Effective communication of the counter-fraud and corruption and whistle-blowing policies.

## 5 - Value for Money

2

### Overview

The Council is continuing to develop its awareness of value for money through the use of a benchmarking exercise undertaken during the year based on the Audit Commission value for money profiles. Unit cost information has been compared to performance data and this will inform the 2007/08 service delivery plans which will be more closely aligned to the budget setting process. Cost and performance continues to be examined through performance reviews carried out by the Performance and Audit team. The Council has strengthened its monitoring process for capital projects to ensure that officers and members are regularly updated on any issues that arise e.g. potential overspends and slippage. Consultation continues to be carried out, for example as part of the corporate plan.

### Key Lines of Enquiry

- The council currently achieves good value for money
- The council manages and improves value for money

2

2

### Areas for consideration

- For 2007/08 the Council should consider and gather evidence of how the benchmarking exercise has been used to inform decision making, for example how cost comparisons to other 'near neighbour' councils has been considered through the service delivery planning process.
- Evidence to show improvements in housing services through implementation of the housing inspection recommendations.
- The Council should evidence how it demonstrates that equity across the community has been considered during the decision making process
- How VFM is incorporated in target setting for service delivery and individual officers
- The capital outturn report to Cabinet June 2006 included details of slippage of 16%. For 2006/07 the Council should consider how the improved monitoring procedures are leading to an improvement in the management of the capital programme.
- Evidence of the outcome of consultation with the community. How have the views of the community shaped service delivery?
- Procurement decisions can demonstrate VFM both through cost savings and improved service.

# Appendix 1 – KLoE scores 2005 v 2006

Theme and Score	2006 score	2005 score
1.1 Accounts compliant with standards and supported by comprehensive working papers	3	1
1.2 promotes external accountability	3	3
<b>Score for theme – Financial Reporting</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1 MTFS deliver strategic priorities	3	3
2.2 The council manages performance against budgets	3	2
2.3 The council manages its asset base	3	3
<b>Score for theme – Financial Management</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
3.1 The council manages its spending within the available resources	2	2
<b>Score for theme – Financial Standing</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
4.1 The council manages its significant business risks	2	2
4.2 The council has arrangements in place to maintain a sound system of internal control	3	3
4.3 The council has arrangements in place that are designed to promote and ensure probity and propriety in the conduct of its business	2	2
<b>Score for theme - Internal Control</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
5.1 The council currently achieves good value for money	2	2
5.2 The council manages and improves value for money	2	2
<b>Score for theme – Value for Money</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

In the event that, pursuant to a request which Charnwood Borough Council has received under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, it is required to disclose any information contained in this report, it will notify PwC promptly and consult with PwC prior to disclosing such report. Charnwood Borough Council agrees to pay due regard to any representations which PwC may make in connection with such disclosure and Charnwood Borough Council shall apply any relevant exemptions which may exist under the Act to such report. If, following consultation with PwC, Charnwood Borough Council discloses this report or any part thereof, it shall ensure that any disclaimer which PwC has included or may subsequently wish to include in the information is reproduced in full in any copies disclosed.

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# District Councils

**Charnwood Borough Council**

**Direction of Travel Assessment**

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

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## Introduction

This tool draws together performance information that is relevant to improvement and will help to inform Relationship Managers (RM) assessment of direction of travel.

In July 2002 the Government and Local Government Association (LGA) agreed a set of seven shared priorities for public services. The priorities were designed to help focus the efforts of the Government and councils for improving public services and this pack makes reference to them.

This pack contains information on performance indicators identified as relevant to assessing progress in the following areas:

- corporate health
- sustainable communities (shared priority)
- safer and stronger communities (shared priority)
- healthier communities (shared priority)

This pack (January 2007) contains the latest available data, which in most cases is 2005/06 data. The final assessment of direction of travel should be informed by this version of the pack. This pack does not contain the user satisfaction survey results as the data is not available for districts until March 2007.

**The indicators selected for use in the pack are intended to give an overall picture to help Relationship Managers without giving particular weight to any one service. It is emphasised that the pack is only one source of evidence and cannot be considered in isolation.**

## Improvement

The tool has been designed to help Relationship Managers consider three aspects of improvement.

- the extent of improvement – what proportion of the indicators are improving;
- the strength of improvement – whether improvement is substantial, or better than expected; and
- the area(s) of improvement – whether improvement is seen in areas of previously weak performance or local priorities.

Extent of improvement and strength of improvement are set out in this tool. The areas of improvement can be considered using information in this tool alongside information provided by the council, for example about its priorities for service improvement.

The tool also contains quartile information to provide context about current performance.

## For more information

Technical questions on the pack or performance indicators should be directed to the PI Team via their web form at: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/performance/contactus.asp>

For other queries about this tool or CPA, please email: [cpa@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:cpa@audit-commission.gov.uk)

## Content

The pack is divided into six sections:

**Introduction** - summarises the purpose of the pack

**Extent of Improvement** – sets out the extent of improvement, based on the proportion of indicators which have improved. This is based on the latest available data, which in most cases is 2005/06 data.

**Context Graph on Current Performance – sets out current performance in quartiles and CPA category.** This is based on the latest available data, which in most cases is the 2005/06 data.

**Improvement Report Part 1 - sets out the direction of travel and strength of improvement / deterioration for each indicator.** It is presented alongside a quartile analysis for further background information on current performance.

**Detailed performance information Part 2 - sets out direction of travel, quartiles and thresholds to provide more detail on individual indicators.** This is based on the latest available data, which in most cases is 2005/06 data. A number of indicators are shown as a grey background with white arrows – these are for context only and have been excluded from the analysis of strength and extent of improvement.

Technical notes are at the back of the pack.

## Extent of Improvement

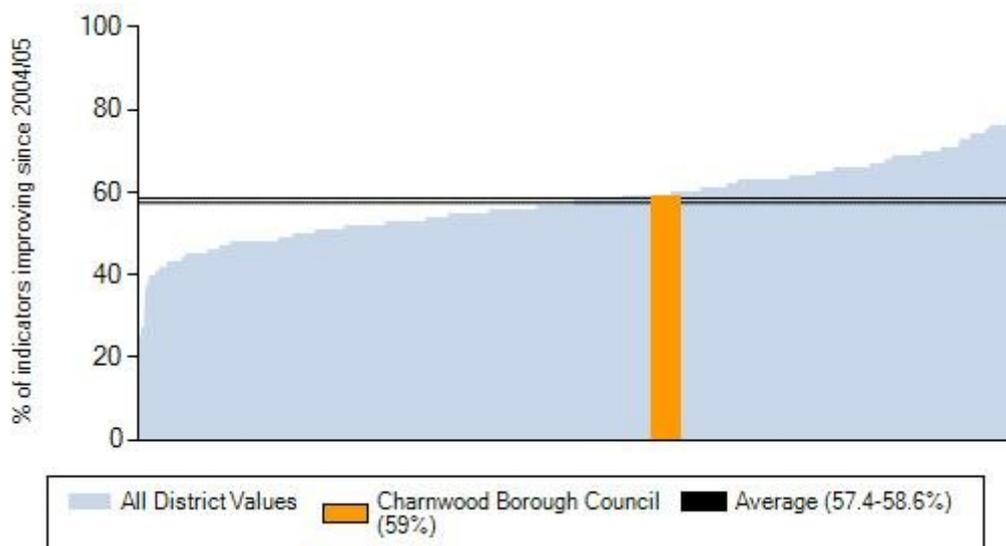
**The extent of improvement for this council is 59 per cent and the average for all other District councils is 58 per cent.**

Extent of improvement is based on a basket of PIs. It measures the degree to which there is a consistent direction of travel across the council's basket of PIs. Extent of improvement is calculated by taking the number of PIs in the basket that have improved since the base year and dividing that by the number of PIs in the basket for which it is possible to make a time series comparison. The results for a council are not affected by the results for other councils. See Note 1.

Based on the basket of PIs used in this tool, 59 per cent of the selected PIs for this council improved over the period.

The chart compares the extent of improvement for this council, i.e. what proportion of PIs selected for analysis are improving, compared to what has been achieved by all other District councils in England. The horizontal lines on the chart indicate the average extent of improvement across all District councils. The average is shown as a range to make allowance for differences between councils in the services they provide and the PIs for which improvement assessments can be made. See Note 2.

### Proportion of PIs that have improved



The extent of improvement analysis only uses data available for both 2004/05 and 2005/06. If data is not available for either year it is labelled as Not Comparable, and excluded from the analysis. There are several reasons why data might be not comparable: the latest data may not be available, or the council may not provide certain services (such as housing management, or waste disposal).

If the council has a high number of indicators which have been qualified, or if the council has not supplied all the indicators it is required to, the number of non comparable indicators will be above the average. Therefore the more the number of indicators the council provides differs from that which is expected, the more the analysis can be skewed. Relationship Managers should be aware of this.

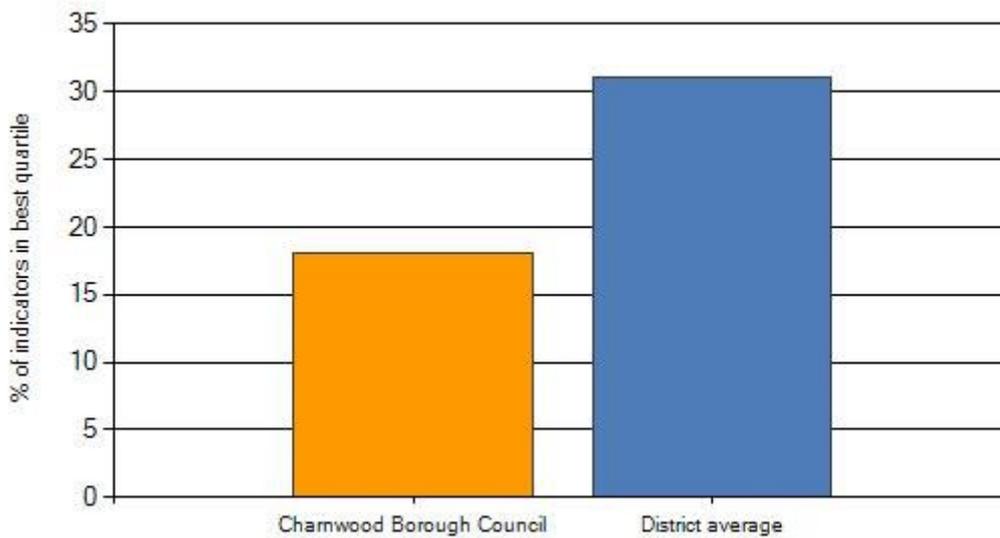
**Relationship Managers need to be aware that this analysis is based only on the performance indicators used in this pack. Different evidence sources may give a different picture of extent of improvement. Any conclusions drawn from this pack must be effectively triangulated with other evidence sources.**

## Context Graph on Current Performance

The chart shows the proportion of PIs for which this council is performing in the 'best' quartile. The chart compares the result for this council with the average for District councils.

The proportion of PIs where this council is performing in the best quartile is 18 per cent.

The current CPA score for this council is Fair.



## Improvement Report

This section sets out the direction of travel and strength of improvement/deterioration for each indicator. It is presented alongside a quartile analysis for further background information on current performance. The improvement being measured is based on the change between 2004/05 and 2005/06 data.

Strength of improvement is based on results for each PI. It measures the extent to which a result for a council has changed by more than would be expected. The amount of change that is expected is determined by a) the average change across all councils; b) the confidence limit selected; and c) whether the council is starting from a position that is close to, or far from, the best possible result.

Strength of improvement is a relative measure and is included in this tool to provide some additional comparative information on improvement. Councils which make the biggest changes relative to what is expected are categorised as improving, or deteriorating, 'substantially'. See Note 3.

The following symbols are used to show different categories of improvement at the individual PI level.

	Improving substantially
	Improving
	No Change
	Deteriorating
	Deteriorating substantially

In some cases it is not appropriate to show whether a PI has improved. The following symbols are used in those cases where it is not appropriate to show an improvement.

<b>Q</b>	One or more of the data in the calculation is qualified
<b>M</b>	One or more of the data in the calculation is missing
<b>NC</b>	Either the PI was not collected in one or both of the years under comparison, or the council was not required to provide the PI in one or both years.
<b>NA</b>	It is not appropriate to show an improvement for this PI

## Corporate Health

	Improvement since 2004/05	Current Quartile			
		Best	2nd	3rd	Worst
Ombudsman: average number of days to respond to complaints	△				
BVPI 2b Duty to promote race equality	△				
BVPI 8 Percentage of invoices paid by agreed date or within 30 days	▽				
BVPI 9 Percentage of Council Tax collected	△				
BVPI 10 Percentage of NNDR collected	◁▷				
BVPI 157 Percentage of interactions with public which are capable of electronic service delivery	△				
BVPI 78a Housing benefit claims: Average time to process new claims (days)	▽				
BVPI 78b Housing benefit claims: Average time to process changes of circumstances (days)	◁▷				
BVPI 79a Housing benefit claims: Cases processed correctly	◁▷				
BVPI 79b i The amount of Housing Benefit overpayments (HB) recovered as a percentage of all HB overpayments.	NC				
BVPI 79b ii Housing Benefit overpayments recovered as a	NC				

percentage of the total amount of HB overpayment debt.					
Ratio of percentage of top 5% of earners who are women (BVPI 11a) to percentage of women in the population	△				
Ratio of percentage of top 5% of earners from BME communities (BVPI 11b) to percentage of working age population from BME communities (BVPI 17b)	▽				
Ratio of percentage of top 5% of earners with disabilities (BVPI 11c) to percentage of working age population with a disability (BV16b)	NC				
Percentage of staff from BME communities (BVPI 17a) as a ratio of percentage of working age population from BME communities (BVPI 17b)	△				
Percentage of staff with disabilities (BVPI 16a) as a ratio of percentage of working age in the population with a disability (BVPI 16b)	◁▷				

## Sustainable Communities

	Improvement since 2004/05	Current Quartile			
		Best	2nd	3rd	Worst
Percentage of economically active population aged 16+ in employment (LFS)	△				
BVPI 205 Planning: Quality of service checklist	▲				
BVPI 109a Percentage of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks.	△				
BVPI 109b Percentage of minor planning applications determined within 8 weeks.	◁▷				
BVPI 109c Percentage of other planning applications determined within 8 weeks.	△				
BVPI 204 Planning appeals: percentage allowed	▽				
Council's result for BVPI 82a & b as a percentage of its target set by DEFRA for 2005/06	▲				
BVPI 84a Household waste collection (kilograms per head)	▽				
BVPI 91a Percentage of households	△				

served by a kerbside collection of recyclables					
Percentage change in the number of households in temporary accommodation at 31st March	△				
BVPI 183a Average length of stay in B&B accommodation (in weeks)	△				
BVPI 183b Average length of stay in hostel accommodation (in weeks)	△				
BVPI 184a The percentage of LA dwellings which were non-decent at the start of the financial year.	NC				

## Safer & Stronger Communities

	Improvement since 2004/05	Current Quartile			
		Best	2nd	3rd	Worst
BVPI 166a Score against a checklist of enforcement best practice for environmental health	△				
CDRP: Domestic burglaries per 1,000 households	▼				
CDRP: Robberies per 1,000 persons	<◇				
CDRP: Theft of a motor vehicle per 1,000 persons	△				
CDRP: Theft from a motor vehicle crimes per 1,000 persons	△				
CDRP: Violence against the person per 1000 persons	▽				
CDRP: Sexual Offences per 1000 population	△				

## Healthier Communities

	Improvement since 2004/05	Current Quartile			
		Best	2nd	3rd	Worst
BVPI 63 Energy Efficiency of Housing Stock - Average SAP rating of LA homes	NC				
BVPI 64 Number of non-LA-owned vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished during the year as a direct result of action by the authority.	NC				



## Detailed Performance Information

This section presents the detailed performance information that is summarised in the improvement report.

### Key to Symbols and Tables

Key indicators are the indicators used to measure current performance and improvement in this tool.

They tend to measure things that can be directly attributable to the authority.

Key indicators can be distinguished by the following:

- The column showing the direction of travel each year is labelled 'Improving' ↑ 'Deteriorating' ↓. The background of this column is white, and the arrows are black.
- The column labelled 'Quartile Position' shows which quartile the result appears in. Quartiles range from 'best' to 'worst'. The '2nd' quartile is always the second best quartile - irrespective of whether a high value or a low value is best.
- The columns showing the quartile thresholds are labelled 'Best', 'Median' and 'Worst'. 'Best' always appears first, irrespective of whether a high value or a low value is best.
- 'Not Comp' indicates the data required to calculate a 'Quartile Position' is not available.

An example of a key indicator is below:

#### BVPI 179 Percentage of standard searches done in 10 working days

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	84		3 <sup>rd</sup> Quartile	100	97	80
	2004/05	96	↑	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quartile	100	100	94
	2005/06	90	↓	Worst Quartile	100	100	97

The result improved during 04/05. An up arrow is therefore displayed.

The result did not improve during 05/06. A down arrow is therefore displayed.

Other PIs shown in this section, i.e. those given without a direction of travel or quartile position, are given as contextual information rather than measures of current performance or improvement.

The following symbols are used in tables:

<b>Improving ↑</b> <b>Deteriorating ↓</b>	
↑	An upward arrow indicates the result improved in comparison to the previous year.
↓	A downward arrow indicates the result deteriorated in comparison to the previous year.
→←	A pair of arrows indicates the result was the same as the previous year.
M	'M' indicates that the council did not provide data for that year.
Blank or 'N/A'	A blank entry with no qualifier indicates that the council was not required to submit a result.
Q	'Q' indicates that the PI was qualified by auditors. Improvements and quartiles cannot be shown if the PI has been qualified.

Some context indicators also appear in this pack. Context indicators are provided so that a council's performance can be set against contextual information. Context indicators are not included in the improvement analysis.

Context indicators can be distinguished by the following:

- The column showing the direction of travel each year is labelled 'Increasing' ↑ 'Decreasing' ↓. The background of this column is grey, and the arrows are white.
- The column labelled 'Quartile Position' shows which quartile the result appears in. Quartiles range from 'lowest' to 'highest'. The '2nd' quartile is always the second lowest quartile.
- The columns showing the quartile thresholds are labelled 'Lowest', 'Median' and 'Highest'. 'Lowest' always appears first.

The example of a context indicator that appears below shows the volume of benefits claimants visited. This contextual information can be used in conjunction with the other benefits key performance indicators to set the council's performance in context.

### BVPI 76a Number of Housing Benefit and Council Tax claimants visited per 1,000 case load.

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Increasing ↑ Decreasing ↓	Quartile Position	Lowest	Median	Highest
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	320		Highest Quartile	68	202	311
	2004/05	211	↓	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quartile	156	217	282
	2005/06	269	↑	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quartile	198	241	319

The column showing movement has a grey background

Quartiles are labelled as 'Lowest' to 'Highest'

## Corporate Health

### Ombudsman: Total complaints received

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Increasing ↑ Decreasing ↓	Quartile Position	Lowest	Median	Highest
All Councils	2003/04	48		3rd Quartile	17	28	49
	2004/05	51	↑	3rd Quartile	18	28	51
	2005/06	34	↓	3rd Quartile	16	28	52

### Ombudsman: Decisions with findings of maladministration

In 2005/06 the Ombudsman did not issue any decisions with findings of maladministration.

### Ombudsman: average number of days to respond to complaints

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
All Councils	2003/04	31		3rd Quartile	23	28	34
	2004/05	43	↓	Worst Quartile	23	27	33
	2005/06	37	↑	Worst Quartile	24	28	34

## BVPI 2a Equality standard for local government

Charnwood Borough Council has achieved level 1 of the equality standard for local government.

The table below shows the percentage of councils achieving each level of the equality standard for local government.

Level Achieved	% of Councils
Level 0	8%
Level 1	42%
Level 2	33%
Level 3	15%
Level 4	1%
Level 5	1%

## BVPI 2b Duty to promote race equality

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
All Councils	2003/04	68		Best Quartile	63	47	33
	2004/05	68	↔	2nd Quartile	74	58	42
	2005/06	74	↑	2nd Quartile	79	63	53

## BVPI 8 Percentage of invoices paid by agreed date or within 30 days

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
All Councils	2003/04	86		Worst Quartile	96	92	88
	2004/05	83	↓	Worst Quartile	96	93	89
	2005/06	75	↓	Worst Quartile	97	93	90

### BVPI 9 Percentage of Council Tax collected: Adjusted for deprivation (see note 4)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Increasing ↑ Decreasing ↓	Quartile Position	Lowest	Median	Highest
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	99.7		2nd Quartile	99	99.7	100
	2004/05	99.4	↓	2nd Quartile	99.1	99.8	100
	2005/06	99.5	↑	2nd Quartile	99.2	99.9	100

### BVPI 9 Percentage of Council Tax collected: non adjusted

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	98.1		2nd Quartile	98.3	97.5	96
	2004/05	97.8	↓	2nd Quartile	98.3	97.6	96.4
	2005/06	97.9	↑	2nd Quartile	98.4	97.6	96.4

### BVPI 10 Percentage of NNDR collected

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	99.5		Best Quartile	99.1	98.6	97.8
	2004/05	99.5	↔	Best Quartile	99.1	98.6	98
	2005/06	99.5	↔	Best Quartile	99.3	98.8	98.1

### BVPI 157 Percentage of interactions with public which are capable of electronic service delivery

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
All Councils	2003/04	60		3rd Quartile	73	65	52
	2004/05	69	↑	3rd Quartile	87	77	67
	2005/06	100	↑	Best Quartile	100	100	97

### BVPI 76a Number of Housing Benefit and Council Tax claimants visited per 1,000 caseload

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Increasing ↑ Decreasing ↓	Quartile Position	Lowest	Median	Highest
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	136		2nd Quartile	68	202	311
	2004/05	192	↑	2nd Quartile	156	217	282
	2005/06	319	↑	3rd Quartile	198	241	319

### BVPI 76c Number of Housing Benefit and Council Tax fraud investigations per 1,000 caseload

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Increasing ↑ Decreasing ↓	Quartile Position	Lowest	Median	Highest
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	31		2nd Quartile	25	37	53
	2004/05	30	↓	2nd Quartile	24	37	53
	2005/06	30	↔	2nd Quartile	25	39	55

### BVPI 78a Housing benefit claims: Average time to process new claims (days)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	32		Best Quartile	32	40	50
	2004/05	31	↑	2nd Quartile	29	35	45
	2005/06	32	↓	2nd Quartile	26	32	39

### BVPI 78b Housing benefit claims: Average time to process changes of circumstances (days)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	9		2nd Quartile	8	11	15
	2004/05	11	↓	3rd Quartile	7	10	15
	2005/06	11	↔	2nd Quartile	9	14	19

**BVPI 79a Housing benefit claims: Cases processed correctly**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	98.8		Best Quartile	98.8	97.8	96.4
	2004/05	98.6	↓	2nd Quartile	99	98	96.2
	2005/06	98.6	↔	2nd Quartile	99	98.2	96.6

**BVPI 79b i The amount of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered as a percentage of all HB overpayments**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2005/06	73		2nd Quartile	79	70	59

**BVPI 79b ii Housing Benefit overpayments recovered as a percentage of the total amount of HB overpayment debt outstanding at the start of the year, plus amount of HB overpayments identified during the year**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2005/06	10		Worst Quartile	40	33	27

**BVPI 79b iii Housing Benefit overpayments written off as a percentage of the total amount of HB overpayment debt outstanding at the start of the year, plus amount of HB overpayments identified during the year**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Increasing ↑ Decreasing ↓	Quartile Position	Lowest	Median	Highest
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04			Not Comp			
	2004/05			Not Comp			
	2005/06	1		Lowest Quartile	3	4	7

**BVPI 63 Average SAP rating of local authority owned dwellings**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	63	Q	Not Comp	65	61	57
	2004/05	63	Q	Not Comp	68	65	60
	2005/06	64		3rd Quartile	69	67	63

**Ratio of percentage of top 5% of earners who are women (BVPI 11a) to percentage of women in the population**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
All Councils	2003/04	18		Worst Quartile	78	57	35
	2004/05	34	↑	Worst Quartile	81	60	40
	2005/06	40	↑	Worst Quartile	86	64	44

**Ratio of percentage of top 5% of earners from BME communities (BVPI 11b) to percentage of working age population from BME communities (BVPI 17b)**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
All Councils	2003/04	0		3rd Quartile	65	18	0
	2004/05	0	↓	3rd Quartile	70	15	0
	2005/06	0	↓	3rd Quartile	84	32	0

**Ratio of percentage of top 5% of earners with disabilities (BVPI 11c) to percentage of working age population with a disability (BV16b)**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
All Councils	2003/04			Not Comp			
	2004/05			Not Comp			
	2005/06	29		2nd Quartile	37	16	0

### Percentage of staff from BME communities (BVPI 17a) as a ratio of percentage of working age population from BME communities (BVPI 17b)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
All Councils	2003/04	81		2nd Quartile	85	63	45
	2004/05	79	↓	2nd Quartile	100	71	50
	2005/06	81	↑	2nd Quartile	100	74	54

### Percentage of staff with disabilities (BVPI 16a) as a ratio of percentage of working age in the population with a disability (BVPI 16b)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
All Councils	2003/04	60		Best Quartile	29	17	11
	2004/05	18	↓	2nd Quartile	31	18	12
	2005/06	18	↔	3rd Quartile	32	21	13

## Sustainable Communities

### Percentage of economically active population aged 16+ in employment (LFS)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
District Councils	2001/02	76		3rd Quartile	82	79	75
	2002/03	77	↑	3rd Quartile	82	79	75
	2003/04	79	↑	2nd Quartile	82	79	76

### BVPI 205 Planning: Quality of service checklist

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2004/05	78		3rd Quartile	89	83	72
	2005/06	100	↑	Best Quartile	95	94	83

### BVPI 109 Percentage of all planning applications dealt with in timescale

According to Government development control targets, 60 per cent of major applications should be dealt with in 13 weeks, 65 per cent of minor applications should be dealt with in 8 weeks and 80 per cent of other applications should be dealt with in 8 weeks. Further planning standards may be set for councils that consistently fail to achieve one or more of these targets.

### BVPI 109a Percentage of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	44		3rd Quartile	63	52	40
	2004/05	63	↑	2nd Quartile	69	58	47
	2005/06	66	↑	3rd Quartile	75	67	58

### BVPI 109b Percentage of minor planning applications determined within 8 weeks

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	60		3rd Quartile	70	61	53
	2004/05	80	↑	Best Quartile	75	69	61
	2005/06	80	↔	2nd Quartile	81	75	69

### BVPI 109c Percentage of other planning applications determined within 8 weeks

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	84		2nd Quartile	85	80	73
	2004/05	87	↑	2nd Quartile	88	84	80
	2005/06	91	↑	2nd Quartile	92	88	84

### BVPI 204 Planning appeals: percentage allowed

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2004/05	23		Best Quartile	25	30	38
	2005/06	33	↓	3rd Quartile	25	31	36

### Council's result for BVPI 82a & b as a percentage of its target set by DEFRA for 2005/06 (see note 5)

DEFRA have set a target for this authority to recycle or compost 30 per cent of its household waste by 2005/06.

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
All Councils	2003/04	55		Worst Quartile	95	75	63
	2004/05	80	↑	3rd Quartile	100	86	72
	2005/06	100	↑	Best Quartile	100	100	92

### BVPI 84a Household waste collection (kilograms per head)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Waste group Councils	2003/04	324		Best Quartile	372	401	430
	2004/05	324	↔	Best Quartile	380	411	443
	2005/06	332	↓	Best Quartile	381	410	443

### BVPI 91a Percentage of households served by a kerbside collection of recyclables (one recyclable)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	100		Best Quartile	100	95	80
	2004/05	100	↑	Best Quartile	100	97	89
	2005/06	100	↑	Best Quartile	100	99	94

### BVPI 86 Cost of waste collection per household

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Increasing ↑ Decreasing ↓	Quartile Position	Lowest	Median	Highest
Waste group Councils	2003/04	37.67		2nd Quartile	33.19	38	42.82
	2004/05	47.09	↑	3rd Quartile	35.66	42.01	48.1
	2005/06	64.87	↑	Highest Quartile	40.28	46.25	52.61

### Affordable housing completions or acquisitions per thousand dwellings (HIP)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	2.7		Best Quartile	2	1.2	0.5
	2004/05	0.6	↓	3rd Quartile	2.2	1.2	0.5
	2005/06	2.1	↑	2nd Quartile	2.4	1.4	0.7

### Number of low demand homes per thousand dwellings (HIP)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Increasing ↑ Decreasing ↓	Quartile Position	Lowest	Median	Highest
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	3		3rd Quartile	0	0.7	7.6
	2004/05	3.3	↑	3rd Quartile	0	0.8	7.4
	2005/06	3.3	↔	3rd Quartile	0	1.1	6.3

### Percentage change in the number of households in temporary accommodation at 31 March

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04			Not Comp			
	2004/05	35		Worst Quartile	-7	9	28
	2005/06	10	↑	3rd Quartile	-16	0	19

### BVPI 183a Average length of stay in B&B accommodation (in weeks)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	5		2nd Quartile	1	5	9
	2004/05	5	↔	3rd Quartile	1	3	5
	2005/06	2	↑	2nd Quartile	1	3	4

### BVPI 183b Average length of stay in hostel accommodation (in weeks)

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	8		2nd Quartile	0	9	21
	2004/05	0	↑	Best Quartile	0	8	18
	2005/06	0	↑	Best Quartile	0	7	17

### BVPI 184a The percentage of LA dwellings which were non-decent at the start of the financial year

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	44	Q	Not Comp	21	36	53
	2004/05	39	Q	Not Comp	21	33	48
	2005/06	37		3rd Quartile	15	30	47

### BV 184b The percentage change in the proportion of non-decent dwellings between the start and the end of the financial year

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	5		Not Comp	4	13	24
	2004/05	11		Not Comp	5	13	24
	2005/06	16		3rd Quartile	4	14	28

## Safer and stronger communities

### BVPI 166a Score against a checklist of enforcement best practice for environmental health

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	86		2nd Quartile	90	83	70
	2004/05	81	↓	3rd Quartile	97	90	79
	2005/06	85	↑	3rd Quartile	100	93	85

### CDRP: Domestic burglaries per 1,000 households

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
CDRP Family Councils	2003/04	15.7		3rd Quartile	10.8	12.9	15.9
	2004/05	11.8	↑	3rd Quartile	8.8	10	13.7
	2005/06	15.2	↓	Worst Quartile	7.4	9.2	13.9

**CDRP: Robberies per 1,000 persons**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
CDRP Family Councils	2003/04	0.7		Best Quartile	0.7	0.7	0.8
	2004/05	0.9	↓	3rd Quartile	0.4	0.6	0.9
	2005/06	0.9	↔	Worst Quartile	0.5	0.6	0.7

**CDRP: Theft of a motor vehicle per 1,000 persons**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
CDRP Family Councils	2003/04	3.9		3rd Quartile	2.6	3.2	4.5
	2004/05	3.6	↑	Worst Quartile	2.3	2.6	3.5
	2005/06	2.6	↑	2nd Quartile	2.1	2.6	3.4

**CDRP: Theft from a motor vehicle crimes per 1,000 persons**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
CDRP Family Councils	2003/04	10.4		3rd Quartile	6.4	9.6	12
	2004/05	8.1	↑	3rd Quartile	5.4	7.6	9.7
	2005/06	7.3	↑	3rd Quartile	5.8	7.2	9.1

**CDRP: Violence against the person per 1,000 persons**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
CDRP Family Councils	2003/04	14.6		2nd Quartile	12.7	14.6	19.6
	2004/05	19.2	↓	3rd Quartile	14	19	20.3
	2005/06	19.3	↓	Worst Quartile	14	16.7	19

**CDRP: Sexual Offences per 1,000 population**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
CDRP Family Councils	2003/04	0.8		3rd Quartile	0.7	0.7	0.9
	2004/05	1.2	↓	Worst Quartile	0.8	1	1.1
	2005/06	1.1	↑	3rd Quartile	0.9	1	1.1

**Healthier Communities****BVPI 63 Energy Efficiency of Housing Stock - Average SAP rating of LA homes**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	63	Q	Not Comp	65	61	57
	2004/05	63	Q	Not Comp	68	65	60
	2005/06	64		3rd Quartile	69	67	63

**BVPI 64 Number of non-local authority-owned vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished during the financial year as a direct result of action by the local authority**

Comparator Group	Year	This LA	Improving ↑ Deteriorating ↓	Quartile Position	Best	Median	Worst
Single Tier and District Councils	2003/04	40	Q	Not Comp	46	15	3
	2004/05	25	Q	Not Comp	56	17	4
	2005/06	45		2nd Quartile	77	27	7

## Appendix 1 – Notes and technical guidance

The data used in this tool was extracted on 05 February 2007.

### Note 1 Identifying improvement and deterioration

An indicator is classified as improving when either:

- there is a change in the result between two time periods in a direction of the polarity of the indicator; or
- the result is the same in both time periods and both results equal the best possible result for the indicator (e.g. 100%).

An indicator will be classified as deteriorating when either:

- there is a change in the result between two time periods in the opposite direction of the polarity of the indicator; or
- the result is the same in both time periods and both results equal the worst possible result for the indicator (e.g. 0%).

Calculations of improvement are based on rounded data.

If one or both of the data items for the calculation are missing or qualified, no result will be calculated.

For example, BVPI 179 (% of standard planning searches carried out within 10 working days) as a polarity of high, a maximum result of 100%, a minimum result of 0% and results are rounded to 0 decimal places.

Example	2002/03	2004/05	Calculation	Result
A	97.6	99.1	$99 - 98 = +1$	Improvement
B	99.1	97.6	$98 - 99 = -1$	Deterioration
C	99.6	99.9	$100 - 100 = 0$	Improvement
D	0.4	0.4	$0 - 0 = 0$	Deterioration
E	97.6	98.2	$98 - 98 = 0$	No change

### Note 2 Extent of improvement

The average extent of improvement for all single tier and county councils and the associated confidence intervals (at the 0.05 level), based on the basket of indicators, are shown in the table below.

	Mean	CI	Upper	Lower
Single Tiers	67	0.8	67.8	66.2
Counties	62	1.5	63.5	60.5
Districts	58	0.6	58.6	57.4

Councils with an extent of improvement of more than the upper level are classified as above average. Councils with an extent of improvement less than the lower level are classified as below average. Other councils are classified as within the average range.

There are two versions of this pack: one for single tier authorities and one for counties. This is due to the difference in the number of comparable indicators for each type of authority.

### **Note 3 Identifying substantial improvement and deterioration**

Strength of change is a relative measure. Instead of looking at whether a result has simply got better or worse, strength of change considers whether the size of the change is big enough to be considered substantial relative to other councils.

A council that performs well on most indicators will find it harder than other councils to make substantial changes. Only a minority of results for a PI can be classed as substantial.

The amount of change that is expected is determined by

- a) the average change across all councils,
- b) the confidence limit selected and
- c) whether the starting position for a council is close to the best possible result.

We have used standard statistical methods appropriate to each PI to determine what is classed as substantial. A technical document, setting out the approach to flagging substantial improvement, is available by emailing [cpa@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:cpa@audit-commission.gov.uk) with the title Substantial improvement technical paper.

### **Note 4 Deprivation adjustments**

The Commission's approach to using PIs in the service assessments for CPA for single tier and county councils includes arrangements for taking account of the relationship between some aspects of performance and local conditions where there is evidence for doing so. Reported performance on a number of PIs in this tool has been adjusted for deprivation using the methodology set out in *CPA - District Council Framework from 2006, service performance information*, available from <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/districts>

The adjustment is based on the relationship between each PI and deprivation. The gradient represents the change we would expect to see in the result of the PI, for each unit change in the level of deprivation. For example if the level of deprivation in a council increased by 1, we would expect the level of satisfaction of housing tenants to go down by -0.44%. The gradient values used for each indicator are as follows:

BVPI9 Percentage of Council Tax collected	-0.1349
---	---------

The adjusted PI value is calculated using the following equation:

Adjusted PI value = original PI value – linear function of deprivation

For example,

Original PI value = 38%

Gradient = -0.25

Deprivation (IMD 2004 average score) = 36

Adjusted PI = Original PI value – (Gradient x IMD 2004)

Adjusted PI = 38% - (-0.25 x 36)

Adjusted PI = 38% - (-9)

Adjusted PI = 47%

When the adjustment results in a value exceeding the maximum, or minimum, allowable, the adjusted figure is capped at the maximum - or minimum - value (for example, 100 per cent).

### **Note 5 Recycling standards**

In 2005/06 the council recycled 36 percent of its waste. This achieved the target set by DEFRA for 2005/06.

Statutory targets for recycling and composting were set by DEFRA for local authorities in England for 2003/04 and for 2005/06. Performance against these targets is measured by adding together the results for Best Value Indicators 82(a) (recycling) and 82(b) (composting).

The targets used in this tool are taken from Statutory Instrument 2005 No. 598 (See Link) <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20050598.htm>

# Access to Services

**Charnwood Borough Council**

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

### **Copies of this report**

If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call 0845 056 0566.

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## Service Inspection

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our strategic plan and strategic regulation. They also reflect the principles from *The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003)*.

Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater co-ordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self-assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk).

This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under section 13 of the 1999 Act.

## Summary

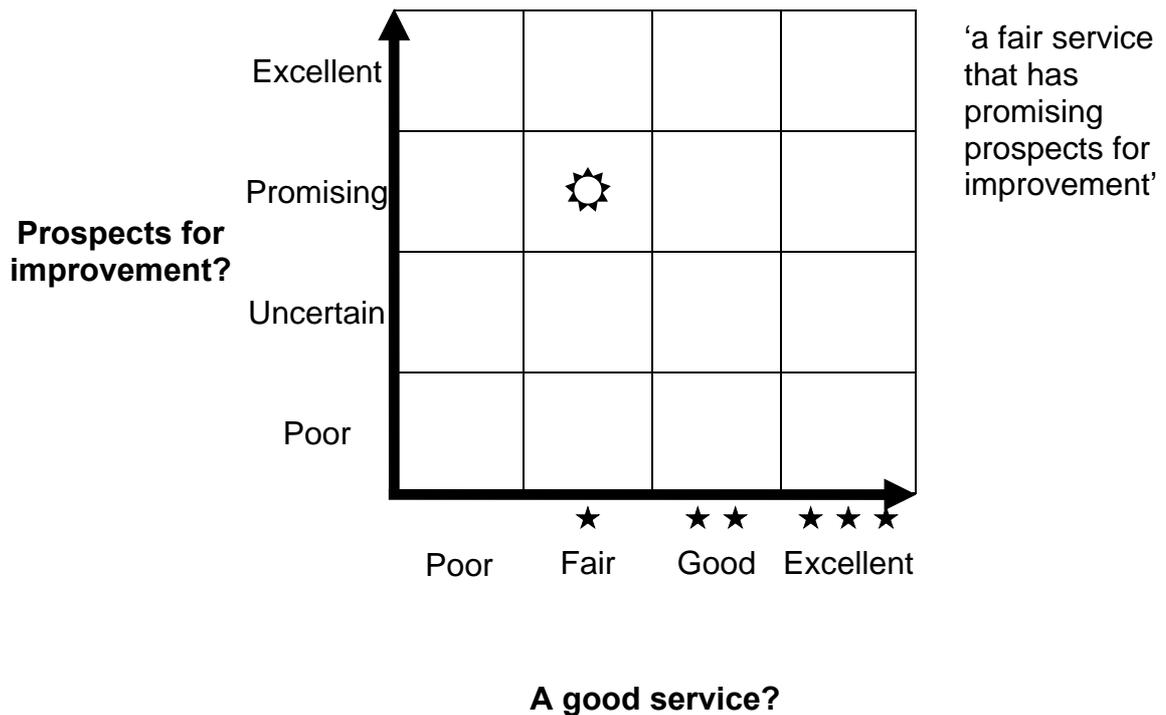
- 1 Charnwood borough is situated in the north of Leicestershire. The major town is Loughborough but a considerable number of residents also live in the borough's smaller towns and villages. The total population is 160,100 following an increase of 2.54 per cent between 2001 and 2004. People from black and minority ethnic communities represent 10.8 per cent of the population.
- 2 Access to services (the service) is a cross-cutting theme applicable to all councils and council services. It covers four broad areas: ease of access to services; using e-government to support access to services; reaching all parts of the community; and partnership working. For customers, this means that they should be able to contact councils in a range of accessible and DDA compliant physical localities. They should also be able to contact councils through a range of other remote methods. This includes a website which is fully accessible and easy to navigate with appropriate arrangements for electronic transactions, electronic communication and consultation.
- 3 Accessibility means that Council services, and access to those services, should be focused on the needs of the whole community. They should ensure equality of access and take proper account of equality and the diversity of all service users. There should be appropriate arrangements for consulting, engaging and communicating with users and non-users of services. Councils should use partnership working with neighbouring councils, organisations and businesses to provide seamless and high quality access to services wherever this possible. Councils should also have an e-government programme informed by citizen/user needs and aspirations.
- 4 Charnwood Borough Council's approach to accessing its services is 'fair' because access arrangements are improving and Council services can be accessed through the Customer Contact Centre, Customer Service Centre, Connect Service Shop, Joint Help Points and via the website. The Council has invested resources to significantly improve physical access to the Customer Service Centre. The quality of information promoting Council services is good and many services can be accessed electronically. Satisfaction with the way complaints are handled is good. However, consultation and engagement with some sections of the community and traditionally hard to reach groups is limited thereby restricting the Council's understanding of their access needs and preferences. Service standards are not consistently informed by users to ensure their needs are met, access to some services is limited and there is some poor quality of service when enquiries are passed from the first point of contact to individual departments. The Council's approach to value for money is underdeveloped.

- 5 The Council's prospects for improvement are 'promising'. It has a track record of delivering improvements to access, the political will to deliver further improvements, and the financial resources to do this. The Customer Services Strategy provides a clear vision for access to services, but this does not include specific or challenging aims, or a timescale for achieving the vision. Plans to deliver the strategy are short-term and there are no medium or long-term plans or milestones. The integrated planning process ensures that service plans and budgets are produced at the same time and the performance management framework monitors delivery of key access to services initiatives. But there is no framework to drive improvements in value for money. There is commitment to training and development for both councillors and staff, with the Charnwood Academy providing a useful electronic resource. But capacity to deliver is reduced by the above average levels of staff absence due to sickness.

## Scoring the service

- 6 We have assessed Charnwood Borough Council as providing a ‘fair’, one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Figure 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>:**



Source: Audit Commission

- 7 The service is a fair, one-star service because:
- Access arrangements for local people are improving, for example physical access to buildings is good with 98 per cent of Council public buildings fully DDA<sup>2</sup> compliant.
  - The majority of Council services can be accessed through the Customer Contact Centre, Customer Service Centre, Connect Service Shop, Joint Help Points and via the website, and if required, there is access to signers, translators and interpreters.

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

<sup>2</sup> DDA - Disability Discrimination Act

## 8 Access to Services | Scoring the service

- Publicity to promote Council services is effective. There is high resident awareness of the Council and of the services they provide.
- There is generally a range of high quality information in appropriate locations and formats informing local people of the services available to them.
- There is consistent application of equalities and diversity considerations in practice.
- Mystery shopping exercises show user experience is good.
- Satisfaction with the way complaints are handled is good.

However:

- The approach to diversity and engagement is still developing as it does not include all groups such as mid age range or local community groups.
- Consultation and engagement with some sections of the community and traditionally hard to reach groups is limited thereby restricting the Council's understanding of their access needs and preferences.
- Access to some services is limited, eg planning.
- There is some poor quality of service when enquiries are passed from the first point of contact to individual departments.
- Service standards are not consistently informed by users to ensure their needs are met.
- Value for money in access to services is underdeveloped.

8 The Council's prospects for improving access to its services are promising because:

- It has a track record of improvements to the reception area in its Southfields office; to its website; and in national performance indicators.
- There is a clear vision for access to services, cascading from the corporate plan, and a short-term improvement plan.
- The integrated planning process ensures that service plans and the budgets are produced at the same time.
- There is visible councillor and officer leadership for access to services and the political will to deliver improved access.

- It has a robust performance management framework with scorecards to monitor progress against key initiatives.
- There is commitment to training and development for both councillors and staff: the Charnwood Academy, available to all on the intranet, provides a key training resource.
- It has the financial resources to deliver improvements.

However:

- The aims for customer access to services are not specific or stretching and the Council does not give a timescale for achieving these.
- Delivery plans are short-term, looking only at the current year: there are no medium or long term delivery plans, or milestones to show progress towards delivering the vision.
- There is no robust framework to drive improvements in value for money.
- Sickness absence levels are above average, reducing Council capacity to deliver improvements.

## Recommendations

- 9 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition we identify the approximate costs<sup>3</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context the inspection team recommends that the Council should do the following:

### **Recommendation**

*R1 Extend and improve the Council's approach to consultation and engagement by building on the work undertaken to date and engaging with:*

- *users and non-users;*
- *marginalised groups; and*
- *local community groups.*

The expected **benefits** of this recommendation are:

- Council services will be better informed by an accurate and complete assessment of needs; and
- an inclusive service which is informed by all residents and users.

The implementation of this recommendation will have **high** impact with **medium** costs. This should be implemented by September 2007.

### **Recommendation**

*R2 Establish a systematic approach to managing and improving value for money for access to services' functions by:*

- *using comparative data already collected, supplemented where necessary, to identify areas where performance is low and/or high cost compared to that achieved by other councils; and challenging the reasons for this;*
- *establishing robust cost and efficiency indicators; and*
- *maximising opportunities for benchmarking to improve understanding of the relative quality and effectiveness of the revenues and benefits contact centre, and to learn from the experiences of other councils.*

The expected **benefits** of this recommendation are:

- improved cost effectiveness of the service;
- raised awareness of value for money within the service and externally; and
- enhanced capacity to target priorities and deliver benefits for users.

<sup>3</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

The implementation of this recommendation will have **high** impact with low net costs following an initial investment. This should be implemented by March 2008.

**Recommendation**

*R3 Develop short, medium and long term action plans to deliver access to services strategies by:*

- *including clear aims, objectives, milestones and resourced improvements over the next three to five years.*

The expected **benefits** of this recommendation are:

- to provide a more coherent and cohesive strategic approach to access to services; and
- greater clarity and transparency of what the Council aims to achieve by improving access to services for staff, partners and other stakeholders

The implementation of this recommendation will have **high** impact with low costs. This should be implemented by July 2007.

# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 10 Charnwood borough is situated in the north of Leicestershire, with the major cities of Nottingham and Derby to the north and Leicester to the south. The major town is Loughborough but a considerable number of residents also live in the borough's smaller towns and villages.
- 11 According mid-year population estimates for 2005, the total population is 160,100. With an increase of 2.54 per cent, there was a positive population change between 2001 and 2004. People from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups form 10.8 per cent of the population (Charnwood Community Profile, 2005 LCC), which compares to the Leicestershire County average of 7.35 per cent. Loughborough Hastings and Thurmaston Wards have the highest BME populations in the Borough (29.7 and 20.6 per cent respectively). The largest BME communities are Indian communities in Thurmaston, Syston West and Loughborough Lemyngton wards and the Bangladeshi communities in Loughborough Hastings and Lemyngton wards. Census data shows that Charnwood has a Black and Minority Ethnic population of 8.3 per cent, 6 per cent being Asian or Asian British.
- 12 Census information reported that there are 60472 households in the area. Recent house price data for July to September 2006 indicate that Charnwood falls below the county for overall average house price, but above the regional average. 86.96 per cent of housing stock is privately owned (2004/05 Housing Investment Programme data).
- 13 Although Charnwood has relatively low deprivation, ranked 262 out of 354 (1 being the most deprived relative to all district, unitary and metropolitan areas), parts of Loughborough Hastings, Loughborough Storer and Loughborough Shelthorpe wards have concentrations of deprivation. At Local Authority level, Charnwood experiences the second highest level of deprivation of the districts in Leicestershire. The overall crime rate for 2005/06 falls below regional and national averages.

- 14 The presence of Loughborough University alongside Loughborough College and the RNIB Vocational College is significant. 9.7 per cent of the population of the Borough are full-time students, aged 16+, against an average for England and Wales of 5.1 per cent (2001 Census, ONS). The University, renowned nationally and internationally, continues to have a beneficial impact upon the local economy. A high concentration of students (approx 5500) in private rented accommodation, mainly within a small geographical area of Loughborough, impacts directly on the shape of provision of many Council services, for instance student exemptions from Council Tax, preferential parking schemes, street management and cleansing services etc. Close working relationships with the University, the Colleges and the Students Union are in place to ensure collaborative working at strategic and operational levels to address policy and service issues pertinent to the student population and local residents.
- 15 Unemployment is 1.5 per cent (Dec 2006), considerably below the average for the East Midlands and England, although this does vary within the borough from 0.6 per cent in East Gosgote and Loughborough Outwoods wards to 5.2 in Loughborough Hastings ward. A higher than average percentage of people aged 16 to 74 are employed in higher professional occupations. Major employers in Charnwood include AstraZeneca R&D, Loughborough University, 3M Healthcare and Arriva Fox County Ltd.

## The Council

- 16 Charnwood has 28 wards with 52 councillors who are elected to the Council once every four years. Since May 2003 the Council has been led by a Labour and Liberal Democrat administration. In the four years prior to this, the administration was shared between the three political parties represented on the Council (Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrat). The Council's constitution is based on a Cabinet with Leader model, with a Cabinet of currently nine Councillors (seven Labour and two Liberal Democrat) usually meeting every three weeks. The Council of all 52 Councillors normally meets once every six weeks. There is a Scrutiny Commission and three Scrutiny Committees, which also meet once every six weeks. All three political parties are represented in the role of chairing the Scrutiny Committees.
- 17 The Council employs approximately 600 staff (full time equivalents), organised into 7 directorates, and the majority of whom are based in Loughborough. General spending by the Council for 2007/08 is planned to be £17.7 million (net) General Fund and £13.7 million for the Housing Revenue Account. The Council also maintains a high level of capital expenditure investment (£9.7 million in 2006/07 and £11.9 million for 2007/08).

- 18 The Council's mission is 'to improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in Charnwood'. This mission has been developed through collaborative working with partners and through public consultation and is underpinned by eight values:
- Accountable;
  - Adds Value;
  - Ambitious;
  - Customer Focused;
  - Develops Talent;
  - Diverse;
  - Innovative; and
  - Open.
- 19 The emphasis on customer access and service improvement is carried through as a Corporate Plan Theme of - 'Customers and Partners - Putting customers and services at the heart of everything we do and to that end joining up our thinking and action with that of partners from across all sectors of the Borough'. Five of the top ten areas that are priorities for improvement in the Council's Corporate Plan relate to customers and partners - reflecting customer and partner expectations and feedback and the Council's intention of becoming an excellent authority. These flow through into detailed actions in Directorate Service Delivery Plans and into actions and targets for individuals via the annual Personal Development Review process. Delivery of the Corporate Plan is supported by five aligned enabling strategies covering finance, diversity, property, workforce and t-government plus integrated performance management and risk management frameworks. This is monitored through the corporate and directorate scorecards.
- 20 The 'Charnwood Together' Community Strategy and the Borough Council Corporate Plan are the key vehicles for the delivery of national, regional and local priorities. The Community Strategy seeks to further a small number of collective improvements actions focusing on people, places, prosperity and partnership. The Strategy was developed in tandem with and aligns to the Leicestershire Local Area Agreement (LAA), delivery of that Agreement being supported by Charnwood Together. The Council's Corporate Plan to 2013/14 is closely aligned to the Community Strategy; the Council's Mission is the same as the Vision in the Community Strategy as the aim is 'to be accessible and understandable to all our service users'.

## National Context

- 21** The Government sees customer access as important and in its 'Strong Leadership – Quality Public Services' white paper it identified seven key tests for local government (joined up, accessible, delivered or supported electronically, delivered jointly, delivered seamlessly, open and accountable, and used by e-citizens). In 1999 the white paper, 'Modernising Government', new reforms and targets required local authorities to move towards electronic delivery in their services to the local community. The intention was that 100 per cent of dealings with Government, including local government and the NHS, should be capable of being conducted electronically by the public by December 2005. BVPI157 required local authorities to review all of their services over a five year period and to challenge the existing methods of service delivery. Other national drivers include the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Human Rights Act 1998; Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and the white paper, 'Modern Local Government – In Touch With the People' which sought to put local government in touch with local communities by improving local democracy, increasing financial accountability and improving local services. Councils should have plans to meet the impending legislative requirements to actively promote disability, gender and age equality as well as meeting the current requirements to promote race equality.
- 22** Access to services is a cross-cutting theme applicable to all councils and council services. It covers four broad areas: ease of access to services; using e-government to support access to services; reaching all parts of the community; and partnership working. For customers, it means that they should be able to contact councils in a range of accessible and DDA compliant physical localities. They should also be able to contact councils through a range of other remote methods. This includes through a fully accessible, easy-to-navigate website. There should be appropriate arrangements for electronic transactions, electronic communication and consultation.
- 23** Accessibility means that Council services, and access to those services, should be focused on the needs of the whole community. They should ensure equality of access and take proper account of equality and the diversity of all service users. There should be appropriate arrangements for consulting, engaging and communicating with users and non-users of services. Councils should use partnership working with neighbouring councils, organisations and businesses to provide seamless and high quality access to services wherever this possible. Councils should also have an e-government programme informed by citizen/user needs and aspirations.

## How good is the service?

### What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 24** The Directorate of Partnerships and Customer Services was formed in 2005 to strengthen the focus on meeting needs of service users. It was also to build on the record of progress evidenced through the establishment of a telephone contact centre, the development of internet services and information, and the creation of a unified reception and customer service function for visitors to council offices. The Directorate brings together a significant range of customer facing services, coupled with responsibilities for communications and consultation across the Council and improved working with partners. All members of the Corporate Senior Management Team have responsibility for leading staff in seeking to improve user experiences of the Council's services. The corporate focus is led by the Director of Partnerships and Customer Services, working with the Cabinet Lead Member for Partnerships and Customer Services. This is underpinned by the ethos of the Council as set out in its eight core values.
- 25** The Customer Service Strategy and the supporting Improvement Plan are the focus for developing public interaction with the Council. The Strategy sets the direction of travel while the supporting Improvement Plan identifies the actions being or planned to be taken to address areas of weakness and opportunity. Key challenges remain around ensuring the needs of the Council's diverse populations are better understood and effectively met; that the Council can better identify and understand the needs of individuals across the range of services they provide; and that the culture of the organisation continues to develop to achieve the right balance between customer needs and achieving value for money. Opportunities that should assist in addressing those challenges arise through t- government investment, developing approaches to data management , shared services and partnership relationships, and further improvements in communication and community engagement, for instance through the neighbourhood management initiatives.
- 26** The Council's aspirations and plans fully embrace the established national agenda for improving satisfaction with local authorities (BV3 and BV4) and through delivering citizen and business centred shared services professionally in the context of achieving value for money. The Council is working closely with Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council on revenues and benefits services and with Rushcliffe Borough Council on other shared services options. The Council's plans have taken into account the views of local people obtained through a range of consultation methods, information from service users and their complaints process.

## Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

### Customer and community focus

- 27 Service delivery is based on the needs of residents and service users. The Council has a corporate focus on improving access through the establishment of a telephone contact centre, the development of internet services and information and the creation of a unified reception and customer service function for visitors to Council offices.
- 28 Service are improving their approach to needs based service design. The Council now operates a concessionary pricing policy for its leisure facilities and activity programmes; the operation of the 'Wild Card scheme' for children ages 5 to 16 years and for people with disabilities. The Council has reinforced the concessionary policy and extended the opportunities for all users to participate. Take-up of these services has improved as result of the Council's actions.
- 29 The Council uses a range of mechanisms to consult and communicate with users and non users but its approach is not yet comprehensive or inclusive of all sections of the community. There is engagement with most sections of the community but the Council is aware there is more to do for some groups, eg local community groups and the mid age range group. A single corporate source of customer data linked to service delivery will help the Council achieve inclusion.
- 30 There is a mixed approach to the use of local, national and best practice research to improve access to services. Despite Charnwood being a pathfinder of the Gov-Metric automated satisfaction survey solution across all three access channels: face to face, telephone and website - detailed information is not yet available for telephone contact or website functionality. This will be addressed by the planned replacement of the telephone call management system and the website content management system in May 2007 and will enable the Council to develop greater consistency in use of national and best practice research.

### Ease of access for all

- 31 Council services can be accessed through telephone contact, fax, minicom, letter, e-mail and face to face. Telephone access via the Customer Contact Centre for cleansing and housing services is available from 8am - 8pm (Monday to Fridays) and Saturday 8am to 1pm with the addition of a separate out of hours telephone number which also provides a link to 'emergency information' on its website. The Council's Customer Service Centre is a one stop shop for face to face enquiries which also hosts Connect Services in partnership with Leicestershire County Council. This partnership extends to Joint Help Points located in libraries throughout the area and which give access to information about all Council services. The Customer Service Centre shares the main telephone and minicom numbers for the council offices and is open between 8.30am and 5pm Monday to Thursday and between 8.30am and 4.30pm on Fridays.

## 18 Access to Services | How good is the service?

- 32 There are good examples of increasing access to services and information through the website, including hard to reach groups. There is an 'Improving Access - My Charnwood' page which enables users to locate and access services in their local area by inputting their postcode, enquiries, reporting a problem, planning applications, benefits calculator, job vacancies and comments/complaints about Council services. The website has useful links to Loughborough Town Hall, Leicestershire villages, Leisure Centres, DirectGov and video presentations, the website content is available in other languages and is linked to the County Council website. However, the Council's website is classified as 'content plus' rather than 'fully transactional'.
- 33 Physical access to public buildings is good. 98 per cent of Council buildings are fully DDA compliant. The Contact Centre, which provides access to a range of Council services including direct access to revenues and benefits services, is accessible to users and takes into account the needs of disabled people. The reception areas are fully DDA compliant, are fitted with induction loops and provide access to signers, translators and interpreters to meet the needs of people with hearing impairments and those whose first language is not English.
- 34 Physical access to services is limited for some residents. Residents, who are not car owners, living in the South of the Borough (Thurmaston and Syston) find it difficult to get to the Contact Centre as there is no direct bus route. The Council are aware of this issue and are currently addressing the need to increase the number of access points across the Borough, eg through leisure centres.
- 35 Access to some services is limited. For example, residents do not have access to planning officers between 9am and 2pm daily. Partners and staff confirmed that this is an issue as planning enquiries are not being dealt with in a timely manner. To address this, Parish Councils now have a dedicated phone line to planners and the Council is reviewing arrangements further to ensure the planning service can be fully accessed by residents.
- 36 Community information is generally of a high quality and widely available from a variety of locations and in a range of formats, eg 'Charnwood News' - the Council's paper which is delivered to all households three times a year. Copies of publications are available in large print, Braille, and other languages through the Interpretation and translation service and information is available in other places, eg libraries and doctor surgeries information. The Contact Centre reception area has a broad range of information available in several formats and can arrange translations of information factsheets. The Council is increasing access to services through this broad-based approach to information distribution.
- 37 The Council has started to target information to hard-to-reach groups to improve their approach to social inclusion. For example, the Council has a mobile benefits office, which is able to process council tax and housing benefit claims from citizens' homes using hand-held computers which link to the back office system.

## Standards

- 38 The Council has corporate service standards and local performance targets for customer services which have been informed by users, in November 2004, to ensure their needs are met. Corporate service standards are in place for visitors to the Contact Centre, replying to letters, e-mails, complaints and answering telephone calls. All standards are available on request, detailed in fact sheets displayed in the Contact Centre, published on the Council's website and in 'Charnwood News'.
- 39 There is a mixed approach to users being involved in setting service standards. The Council publicised Customer Service Standards for all externally facing services in December 2006 but not some services did not consult with users, eg planning. Until all service standards are informed by users, the Council will not know if their needs are being met.
- 40 There is limited evidence that customer care standards apply to services provided by contractors and partners. Partners were aware of the Council's corporate service standards and while some partners have been consulted, others have not.
- 41 External reviews are being used effectively to improve service standards. The Council commissioned two external reviews by ROL and IMPROCOM in 2006 to improve face to face access channels as well as telephony. Recommendations from that report have been incorporated into the Customer Services Improvement Plan and the allocation of resources in 2006/07 to improve the telephony system and functionality.

## Engagement

- 42 The Council uses a range of mechanisms to consult, engage and communicate with users and non-users, but its approach is not yet comprehensive or inclusive of all sections of the community. The long established Citizens' panel, talk back sessions, business liaison groups and individual service consultations provide corporate and service-based opportunities to influence service design and delivery. The Citizens' panel includes representation across most demographic groups but the Council are aware that they need to increase representation from young people and the BME population. To address this, the Council has commissioned a review of the Citizen's Panel structure and methodology by Loughborough University.
- 43 There are some good examples of specific service consultation and engagement activities targeting vulnerable and specific groups of people to access mainstream services but the Council are aware that they need to do more in this area. These activities are starting to inform service improvements. For example, Benefits visiting officers and there has been specific consultation with BME communities and service providers to inform the BME Housing Strategy and action plan.

## 20 Access to Services | How good is the service?

- 44 The Council has started to use a range of feedback mechanisms to inform service improvements. These include the 'grot spot' campaign which addressed a number of cleansing concerns across the Borough, service user survey and focus groups to improve the rent paying service, and the use of the Local Development Forum to improve the planning service.
- 45 Access to services preferences have recently been established by the Council. A specific project was conducted in 2006 and findings included the telephone was the main access method but had the lowest satisfaction amongst residents. The website was the least preferred access medium but had the highest satisfaction. As a result, the Council has invested in a new telephony system and training for staff to improve satisfaction rates.
- 46 The Council has recently improved its approach to communication and consultation. A consultation and communications plan is now used to co-ordinate all consultation activities across the Council. It includes guidance on engaging with 'hard to reach' groups which has been developed through one to one interviews with local groups and research of best practice. This is embedded in the consultation and communication planner templates which specifically prompt lead officers to identify how they will communicate with these groups. Three Community Strategy Support Officers have also recently been recruited to improve community engagement through the neighbourhood management initiatives. The Council publishes details of past, present and future consultations ensuring residents receive feedback regarding how consultation activities have led to service improvements.
- 47 The use of publicity to promote access to services is effective. Users are well informed about the Council's Contact Centre and what services it offers through a wide range of publicity, including the Council's paper, local press, community visits, e-mail/website, and joint work with libraries and other voluntary groups. Feedback from staff and voluntary groups highlights adequate promotion of services particularly to hard-to-reach groups and BME communities but more work can be done to target publicity to promote access to services to non-users, eg to mid age ranges. Despite the Council producing factsheets for this section of the community, this has not been promoted in the Council's paper.

## Diversity

- 48 The Council has a good awareness of diversity and equality issues. There is a current Race Equality Scheme (2006-2008) which includes commitments to community leadership, mainstreaming equality and diversity and being an employer of choice. The Council is currently at Level 2 of the Equalities Standard for Local Government and plans to meet Level 3 by September 2007. The Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) process has been rolled out since April 2006 and to date, the Council have completed nearly 50 per cent of their two year programme. These EIAs have been prioritised by the amount of interaction the service, policy or function has with their customers. Currently, racial incidents are recorded on the Council's Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) system and investigated by anti-social behaviour officers. The Council also sign-posts reporting to the County Council's website and has funded a project to establish reporting centres through the CREC as well as training people receiving incident reports.
- 49 The Council's performance regarding equality and diversity BVPI performance is mixed. The Council is performing in the top 25 per cent of Councils for racial incidents, accessibility, e-government targets, demonstrating good performance for duty to promote race equality, and the percentage of BME staff and disabled staff as a ratio of the working population. It is in the worst 25 per cent of Councils for percentage of women and BME in senior management but the Council acknowledges that its staff are not representative of the community it serves and has put plans in place to address this.
- 50 Access to service centres for people with disabilities is good. For example, the Customer Contact Centre at Southfields is DDA compliant. This includes on-site parking for people with disabilities, automatic doors, disabled toilet facilities, hearing loops, lowered desks, and improved signage. The Council also offer language line in cases where interpreting or translation is necessary.
- 51 The Council has started to use equalities monitoring to inform service improvements. Changes have been made to services following direct customer feedback or through a general awareness that certain groups are not accessing the service. For example, recreational services now have sessions specifically for people with disabilities and there are now established systems in housing, benefits, Building Control and Human Resources. However, plans to address the needs of migrant workers are still at the development stage.
- 52 There is no evidence of equalities considerations in contracts. All tendering processes require the tenderers to provide details on their equalities, customer care policies and practices but there is no evidence that this is carried out. The Council is aware that it needs to strengthen this area as the equalities and diversity strategy states the Council will require contractors to have policies on equality and diversity relating to employment and services.

## 22 Access to Services | How good is the service?

- 53 The Council uses equalities and diversity legislation effectively. There are effective employee monitoring mechanisms in place and equalities issues are integrated in key training courses, such as customer service training, service level planning preparation, performance development reviews and recruitment and selection. Most managers, staff and councillors have now undergone specific equalities and diversity training.

### **Service outcomes for users and the community**

- 54 The Council manages e-government targets effectively. The Council has achieved a number of initiatives to improve electronic access, eg on-line A to Z for all Leicestershire councils; on-line access to past and current committee agendas reports and minutes; fault reporting on-line (and via contact centre); on-line electronic payments (and via contact centre); on-line bookings for sports centres.
- 55 Processes for handling complaints and learning from complaints are effective. Complaints handling is in the best of 25 per cent of Councils nationally. The Council has expanded the corporate complaints and comments system to provide an online reporting facility. Services report monthly and a Corporate Complaints Monitoring Report is produced annually to identify areas of service improvement, for example improved layout to the Contact Centre.
- 56 The Council works effectively with voluntary groups to deliver improved outcomes for specific access needs. The Bridge to address housing needs, Sure Start for a range of community based projects and the Citizen's Advice Bureaux CAB for advice and guidance. Together they provide a broad range of information and referral services to customers.
- 57 The level of management information is currently not sufficient to undertake a robust analysis of access to the Council and therefore make meaningful recommendations regarding activity. Management information is available in relation to the volume of calls and visits (both in person and remotely). For example, GovMetric data indicates 87 per cent of respondents who accessed the Contact Centre by telephone in January rated the service as 'good'. The quarterly call back surveys of call centre users shows that the Council are consistently getting 98 per cent of respondents rating Contact Centre Services as good or better than good but the Council recognises that some people find it hard to reach the Council by telephone as only 27 per cent of calls are answered in the target time of 30 seconds. However, little data is captured regarding the profile of people accessing the Council. For specific services this data is captured in old service specific systems but this is patchy across the Council. This is acknowledged by the Council and measures are being established to collect more in-depth data through the procurement of a new CRM system.

### User experience

- 58** Customer satisfaction with Charnwood Borough Council services is average when compared to other Councils. In the last major survey (2003/04), 61 per cent of people were satisfied with the Council's services overall (61 per cent is average for all Councils). Public satisfaction with other key services, for example parks and open spaces, sports and leisure facilities and museums and galleries is above average when compared to other Councils. However, satisfaction with the housing benefits service and arts activities and venues were below average, 48 and 45 per cent respectively. The Council conducted a further satisfaction survey in early 2006 and results from the Citizen's Panel questionnaire show that only 56 per cent of respondents who contacted the Council were satisfied with the service they receive.
- 59** There are good levels of service at the Customer Service Centre. The reception area is a welcoming and user friendly environment, including disabled access and play facilities for children in the waiting area. Mystery shopping exercises revealed that frontline staff are helpful, polite and knowledgeable and waiting times are kept to a minimum, generally less than five minutes at first point of contact. However, there is less satisfaction with the telephony system as callers experienced long waiting times but once they were connected, received timely advice and information.
- 60** Interaction between reception and back office staff in dealing with some customer enquiries is ineffective. For example, mystery shopping exercises revealed planning related e-mail enquiries not being responded to within ten working days (Council's corporate service standard). Other examples include inability of members of staff to provide adequate information and support at the first point of contact in the Customer Contact Centre. This results in the customer having to wait for another available member of staff runs the potential risk that the Council is excluding users from accessing essential services.

### Is the service delivering value for money?

- 61** The Council's approach to value for money (VfM) is underdeveloped. The Council does not have a robust VfM framework, service plans do not include specific efficiency targets, and there are no clear targets to improve efficiency in access to services, although the Council is achieving the nationally set 2.5 per cent efficiency target. The objectives in the VfM Strategy do not have clear outcomes, measures or milestones and there is limited information regarding how ICT and capital investment is aligned to customer preferences and need.

## 24 Access to Services | How good is the service?

- 62 Benchmarking data regarding the level of service provision at the Contact Centre is limited compared to other authorities. Management information is available in relation to the volume of calls and visits (both in person and remotely) and average cost of a transaction which was completed in late 2006 to assist with Service Level Agreements (SLAs). However, comparative data is limited and little data is captured regarding the profile of people accessing the Council and for specific services, this data is captured in service area legacy systems but this is patchy across the Council. The Council acknowledge this and measures are being established to collect more in-depth data. These measures include the procurement of a new CRM system through the development of the website.
- 63 The Council has processes to deliver value for money in key projects. The procurement of the new CRM system has been managed through the full EU procurement process to ensure competitiveness in securing a value for money solution. The procurement of the telephone system improvements is following the Council's established procurement policies and practices.
- 64 The Council has strengthened its monitoring process for capital projects. The Council aligns its capital programme with policy decisions. Capital projects have a full options appraisal against corporate and service priorities which ensures that the Council is investing in capital projects which meet its aims.
- 65 The Council has now prioritised access to services around its own research on customer preferences to demonstrate value for money. It has analysed access to services in relation to take up, and whether this is efficient use of resources. For example, an assessment of call volumes was conducted in 2006 and the Contact Centre no longer opens on Bank Holiday Mondays. Opening arrangements were widely publicised and no complaints were received.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

### What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 66** The Council responds to reviews and inspections and implements changes that deliver benefits for users. There are improvements in all three of its main access channels of website, telephone, and face to face. The Council has improved its website moving it from simply holding information to a site able to carry out some transactions. As well as making information such as committee papers available, the website also contains electronic forms, the opportunity to make payments on-line, and access to electronic consultation. Other changes include home visits for residents' with mobility difficulties, for example, to help complete benefit forms. These changes have improved the accessibility of services for all residents.
- 67** The Council has a track record of delivering improvements for users in accessing services. In 2005, it merged all reception areas in its Southfields office to provide a single customer access point on the ground floor. The area was changed to accommodate main reception (with low level desks), the cash office and a one stop shop. A recent review led to the operation of the cash office being merged with the one stop shop. Visitors to the Council are screened, with simple queries being resolved at the reception desk, payments being directed straight to the cash office, and longer queries being directed to the customer services advisors. This has significantly improved the experience of users accessing Council services in person.
- 68** The Council is progressing the Customer Services Strategy. The foundations for improved access to services are in place and the Council is on target to deliver its new customer relationship management system and its improved website. There is progress against other identified actions but it is less clear what impact the actions have produced. For example, the telephony project was delayed while decisions were made on additional features, and the collection of customer services data has not yet resulted in an understanding of whether the service provides value for money.
- 69** The telephone contact centre has improved access to a limited number of services but the extension of the CRM system has been delayed by the need to change system supplier. The contact centre provides access to just two services and there are no clear plans to extend it further. It was established in 2003 to improve access for tenants to the housing service, and extended in 2004 to include the cleansing service. Although user satisfaction is high, the contact centre is slow to answer calls – with only 27 per cent of calls answered in the target time of 30 seconds. The limited service of the telephone contact centre does not provide good telephone access to services for all residents.

- 70 The Council has an effective approach to delivering service improvements. It uses feedback to inform its operational improvement plan for the website, the one stop shop and the telephone contact centre. Equality Impact Assessments are being used to identify improvements to customer access with over half of the assessments completed so far. The Council revised its customer service standards and this resulted in reduced complaints to the Ombudsman, down from 28 in 2004/05 to 7 in the first three quarters of 2006/07. This approach gives incremental improvement to access.
- 71 Performance against the national performance indicators relating to access has improved. It has improved access to recycling services, the proportion of electronic interactions possible, and reduced the number of days it takes to respond to a complaint. It exceeded its own target for the proportion of Council buildings that are DDA compliant.
- 72 The Council has a positive direction of travel in key national performance indicators (PIs). Using the Audit Commission service based basket of PIs<sup>4</sup>, Charnwood Borough Council is improving in the majority of indicators. The basket shows that the Council has improved in 73 per cent of PIs as compared with a national average of improvement in 55 per cent, although improvement in access related PIs is mixed. The Council's improvement using the Audit Commission's corporate based basket of PIs<sup>5</sup> is less, with improvement in just over half of the indicators. This basket shows that the Council has improved in 59 per cent of PIs as compared with a national average improvement of 58 per cent, although it also shows improvement in six of the eight access related PIs.

### **How well does the service manage performance?**

- 73 There is a clear vision for the Council's approach to access to services. The Customer Services Strategy cascades from the corporate plan and gives the future vision for access to services. It sets a clear direction for the way the Council connects with its residents through the three channels of internet, telephone and face to face with customer services. This vision is reflected in and supported by a number of other plans and strategies including the asset management plan, the equalities action plan, and the t-government strategy.
- 74 The Council has not set stretching aims or identified the longer-term outcomes it seeks to achieve for accessing services. The Customer Services Strategy is not dated and it does not give clear targets or make clear the outcomes and timescales it is seeking to achieve. Its vision is not expanded into defined stretching aims and there are no milestones to deliver the vision. Without long term outcomes, targets, or milestones the strategy may prove to be unrealistic within the current context and performance.

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<sup>4</sup> Charnwood District Re-categorisation Tool, Audit Commission 2007

<sup>5</sup> Charnwood Direction of travel Tool (February 2007), Audit Commission

- 75 The Council has a comprehensive and integrated planning process but it only plans for one year. The planning process cascades the year's key issues for access to services from the corporate plan and other corporate strategies into relevant service plans. Service plans also include actions against key corporate initiatives, for example they outline the services' approach to equality issues raised in the equalities action plan. The service plans contain detailed action plans for the specific access to services projects in the current year but not all action plans identify timeframes, resources, or outcomes. The integrated planning cycle delivers service plans, revenue budget, and capital budget at the same time. However, the limited forward look limits the effectiveness of the Council's plans.
- 76 Plans for improvement in the current year are clear, but the Council has not translated its vision into specific priorities for the medium or long term. The Charnwood Scorecard sets out this year's goals, measure, and targets for delivering the corporate plan and these are cascaded into departmental scorecards, and into action plans. Most strategies have detailed action plans for the current year (2006/07), but few actions extend beyond March 2007. For example, the customer services improvement plan contains a wide range of issues and actions that need to be delivered, but 110 of these are due for completion by March 2007 with a further 9 due for completion in the following few months. It is not possible to see how the overall vision for access to services will be delivered or what changes residents will see in the medium or longer-term.
- 77 The Council does not have a robust framework for improving value for money in access to services. There are no clear targets to improve efficiency and value for money; the objectives in the Value for Money Strategy do not have clear outcomes, measures or milestones. For example, the strategy says it will have achieved value for money when there is an optimum balance between economy, efficiency, and effectiveness but does not say how it will achieve or measure this. The strategy is not dated and it does not set any timescale or identify links with other Council strategies or plans. The medium term financial strategy is based on the achievement of efficiency savings through partnership working and managers are clear that they need to deliver efficiency savings. But it is not clear what levels of savings are required from each service. There is limited use of comparative data to drive value for money. For example, the tourist information centre collects information on service levels and cost, but the Council does not make any internal comparisons with customer services work.
- 78 There is visible leadership for access to services. There is an officer champion at senior management level and all services have appointed service champions. Although there is collective decision making at Cabinet, it has appointed a lead councillor to champion access to services and councillors have a clear understanding of access to services issues. The Council is prepared to take tough decisions, such as the decision to replace the relatively new customer relationship management system as it would no longer support the vision for access.

- 79 Effectiveness of internal communication is inconsistent across the organisation. All staff should receive regular cascade briefings, team meetings, and one to one meetings with managers, but the implementation of this depends on the service. Some services have regular meetings, but others meet rarely. Information is available on the intranet, but some front-line staff find this difficult to access either because they do not have easy access to computers or because they find the intranet difficult to search. This reduces the organisation's understanding of the needs of residents and of the Council's values.
- 80 There is a robust performance management framework. The performance management framework is based on scorecards which provide information in a clear and easy to understand format. The Charnwood Scorecard reports progress against key actions and projects in the corporate plan and cascades into directorate scorecards which also monitor progress against service plans. These scorecard reports include monitoring of progress on access issues and projects. Reports on the scorecards contain progress against national and local performance indicators as well as progress against Council plans. There is a detailed commentary on any projects or indicators that are not on target. Performance reports are compiled by the performance management team and discussed with the relevant director before being reported to senior managers and councillors quarterly. The framework ensures that progress against corporate initiatives is monitored.
- 81 The scrutiny function is evolving. It has taken some time to develop but now is functioning well with three scrutiny committees. The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee receives exception reporting against national performance indicators together with an explanation about how poor performance will be addressed. The Community and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee scrutinised issues relating to access, considering the needs of users and partners. It looked at the customer access strategy and explored issues impacting on the quality of performance of the telephone contact centre. The scrutiny function helps maintain focus on effective delivery of services.
- 82 There is a detailed project management system. All key projects are managed by project boards which report progress to management team regularly. As there are so many access to services projects, these are managed by a strategic management board with a number of sub-projects each managed as a separate project with its own project specification and project team. The strategic management board is led by a senior manager and includes the lead councillor for access to services. It receives monthly reports on the status of the sub-projects, with the reports including progress on current activities and information on activities for the next month. The project management focus helps to maintain focus on key Council initiatives.

- 83 The Council is self aware and understands where it needs to improve. Although it has made progress in implementing the customer services improvement plan, it recognises that some weaknesses remain and it continues to address these in its service improvement plan. For example, the Council recognises that it needs to engage more fully with some groups and has a work package to address this. It recognises the difficulties that residents in the south of the borough have in accessing services in Southfields office and has a work package to address this.
- 84 User feedback and complaints are used to improve services. There is a robust process for handling complaints; it is well publicised, user friendly, and a recent extension now allows complaints to be reported on-line. Complaints are acted on with, for example, complaints about seating at the Town Hall leading to an improved layout during refurbishment. The Council has started to analyse complaints to identify areas for improvement, but it is too early to judge what impact this has on improving services. Feedback from users is used to improve services as, for example, feedback from visitors to the Southfields office led to improvements to the waiting area.
- 85 The Council learns from others. It used the outcome of the Audit Commission's earlier housing inspection to set up a corporate project addressing the issues raised. External assessments of the customer experience of contacting the Council by telephone, electronically, or face to face resulted in a number of recommendations which have been incorporated into work plans to improve accessibility. The Council uses the experiences of other councils to improve its own services. It identified best practice through the Leicestershire customer services managers group and is using this to develop new customer care standards. The street warden team was established following visits to other authorities to gather best practice before setting up its own teams. Using experiences from outside the organisation will help to provide more customer focused services.

### **Does the service have the capacity to improve?**

- 86 The Council has the financial resources to deliver improvement in its approach to access to services. It has a robust medium term financial plan which provides the financial framework to deliver the priorities and key projects identified in the corporate plan. The MTFP further identifies that the Council has the resources on place to deliver key projects. Projects to deliver the Customer Access Strategy are prioritised as key projects in the corporate plan. Resources to deliver improvements in customer access are secure.

- 87 The Council is prepared to invest in actions that lead to improved access to its services. It has invested in improvements to its customer reception facilities at its Southfields office, improving access for everyone and especially for residents with mobility or sensory impairments. Investment in website development is on track to deliver a fully transactional website, improving access for all. It is investing in a new customer relationship management system and new telephony system which will provide the building blocks for an improved service to customers. As the council has adequate resources, it does not seek external funding to deliver these key projects. Investment of Council resources is improving access for residents and other users.
- 88 There is the political will to deliver improved access. Councillors and officers are clear about their respective strategic and operational roles, with good working relationships. There is support for access issues at Cabinet level with the appointment of a lead councillor, who is involved in all key access projects. This political support will help to ensure that projects to improve access are delivered.
- 89 The Council operates within a strategic human resource (HR) framework to maximise its capacity to deliver its key projects. The strategic HR framework links to the corporate plan aims and seeks to maximise internal capacity through an action plan. It includes a robust staff appraisal scheme, which is cascaded to all. This looks at the effectiveness of staff, sets targets for the future, and identifies any training or development needs. The integrated planning process requires services to assess the resources needed to deliver. The robustness of this assessment is scrutinised by senior officers and councillors to ensure that staff resources are being directed at priority areas and that these priorities can be delivered. In response to an identified need, the Council has recently appointed three additional community support officers to deliver key aspects of the community strategy. This approach to HR should ensure that the Council has the staff resource to deliver service access improvements.
- 90 Whilst the Council can demonstrate consideration of equalities in its employment practices and service delivery the impact has been limited. Its HR framework captures the Council's commitment to equalities and diversity and 75 per cent of HR policies are supported by equality impact assessments. The Council understands the need for it to represent the community it serves and has investigated the under-representation of the black and minority ethnic communities, especially in management posts. It has tried a number of different approaches to recruit from these communities, so far with little success, but its work is continuing.
- 91 The Council's capacity is limited by sickness absence. The latest published PI data shows sickness absence amongst the worst in the country when compared to other councils. The Council recognises that this is a problem and has a key project seeking to reduce sickness absence. It has introduced a new sickness absence management process which includes better management information, a single contact number for staff to report sickness, and earlier referral to occupational health advisors. The new process is showing improvement with sickness absence reduced from 13 days to 10 days per employee (pro rata) in the first nine months of this year (2006/07), although this is still above average.

- 92** Human resource practices support the needs of the services through training and development. The Council is committed to the training and development of staff and it is well resourced with both corporate and service training budgets. Training needs are identified either corporately, for example for customer care training, or individually through the appraisal system. Customer care training is seen as important – there was a comprehensive programme rolled out to all staff last year and it is now included in all induction training. This comprehensive approach to training will help staff carry out their roles effectively.
- 93** Councillor training and development is well planned and available for all. Councillor development is based on the issues in the CPA improvement plan, aiming to build capacity, develop scrutiny, and strengthen performance management. The Leicestershire training partnership developed a councillor training programme following an extensive needs analysis. This programme includes a range of courses from compulsory training for regulatory committee members, to training on scrutiny issues, to use of computing facilities. Courses are offered in a variety of ways to suit all needs using, for example, workshops, seminars, mentoring, and on-line training.
- 94** The Council demonstrates its commitment to training through the Charnwood Academy. This is an electronic resource, offering on-line courses and information on internal and external courses, application forms, and current events in training. It is accessed through the intranet and is open to all staff and councillors. However, not all staff have easy access as, for example, wardens and depot staff may not find it easy to access a computer. The Charnwood Academy provides the opportunity for easy access to training and development for most staff and councillors.
- 95** The Council's procurement practices meet minimum standards. The procurement strategy is based on the national procurement strategy and provides a sound basis for procurement to achieve value for money. All managers are expected to follow the strategy when procuring goods or services. But, the strategy and the procurement pages on the website contain out of date information. Current procurement practices meet minimum requirements for diversity issues, but the Council has just started to use the procurement toolkit developed by the East Midlands Centre of Excellence for Procurement, which includes templates for the consideration of equalities in tendering and contract management. The Council has not maximised the potential use of procurement.
- 96** The Council has extended its capacity through strategic partnership working. It is working in a consortium with other councils in the Leicester-shire e-Government Group to improve its capacity to deliver services electronically. The partnership has delivered a county-wide A to Z of services and has enabled the county-wide reporting of faults such as potholes in the highway.