

Corporate Assessment Report

February 2008



Corporate Assessment

Leicestershire County Council

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Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty, under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003, to make an assessment and report on the performance of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.
 - What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?
 - Ambition
 - Prioritisation
 - What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?
 - Capacity
 - Performance management
 - What has been achieved?
 - Achievement
 - Considered against the shared priorities of:
 - sustainable communities and transport;
 - safer and stronger communities;
 - healthier communities;
 - older people; and
 - children and young people.
- 3 Corporate assessments are normally aligned with a joint area review of services for children and young people (JAR). In practice, this means that the Council's achievements in relation to children and young people are assessed using the evidence provided from the JAR. In addition, examples of outcomes and activity, which are relevant to the other themes and which are identified through the JAR, are considered within the corporate assessment.

- 4 The JAR covers specific services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as relevant health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes especially concerning safeguarding; services for looked after children; and services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The separate JAR report also covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that such services work together to improve outcomes. The description and judgement in respect of children and young people in this report is summarised from the JAR report and the most recently published Annual Performance Assessment from Ofsted which covers all of the Council's children services.

Executive summary

- 5 Overall the Council is performing well, consistently above minimum requirements. With its partners across the county and sub-region, it has developed clear and challenging Council ambitions that are longer-term, cross-cutting and reflect the needs and diversity of its communities. These cover three key, cross-cutting themes - improving the quality of life for people; improving the quality of life in communities; and improving services so that they are high quality and value for money. They provide a clear vision of how Leicestershire will change over the medium and longer-term and are underpinned by challenging targets. The Council is forward looking, with a strong understanding with partners of the key challenges facing Leicestershire and the surrounding sub-region. These include responding to the demands for economic growth, social and environmental improvements. The Council and partners are using the creation of a Multi Area Agreement as a way of creating a shared sub-regional vision and governing its development.
- 6 The Council is providing strong and effective leadership. It has played a leading role with partners in shaping ambitions through Leicestershire Together (LT), the Local Strategic partnership and delivery through the Local Area Agreement (LAA). It is now leading the development of a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) for the county and preparing for a new LAA next year. The Council uses its extensive knowledge and intelligence about the county and its communities to good effect, adopting a long-term approach to issues. The Council is influencing the policies required to promote the provision of affordable housing. While not a housing authority, it uses its position at regional level to ensure that the development policies in the East Midlands Regional Assembly reflect the need to set aside a percentage of new development for affordable housing. The Council's medium term corporate strategy (MTCS) and business plans translate its ambitions into clear priorities with ambitious targets. Partners are involved in setting targets within the LAA, helping ensure that they are challenging and realistic. Political leadership is effective and well regarded. The leader and senior councillors play an active and influential role in championing the needs of the county in terms of economic development, community safety, rural affairs and services for older people and children and young people.
- 7 The Council provides strong community leadership, tackling difficult issues in an inclusive but purposeful way. It has begun to reorganise its secondary education structures from three to two tiers, starting in the Melton area, following extensive consultation, including the views of all of the pupils in the area's schools. It is working to improve community cohesion, such as through bus services in rural areas, increasing employment in former coalmining areas and the siting of traveller communities. It is also promoting foreign direct investment and exports and targeting Chinese tourism agencies to promote inward tourism. The legacy of sometimes difficult relationships with district councils is not however fully resolved.

- 8 Operating within tight financial constraints, the Council has maintained its generally high performance in its own services. It has maintained a strong and highly effective focus on its priorities over the long-term, for instance, in its approach to investing in increasing academic achievement, improving its libraries and in waste management. Leadership from the chief executive and corporate management team (CMT) has been strong and effective. Performance management is effective and developing further, especially through the LAA.
- 9 The Council clearly understands its communities and uses good analysis of needs and communicates well to residents and other stakeholders. It has a range of partnerships that share intelligence of needs, including the Leicestershire Online Research Atlas (LSORA) that the public can also interrogate. It effectively engages with most people including those groups at risk of disadvantage in a variety of ways including traditional methods such as focus groups and a citizens' panel but also through text messages and a dedicated website for young people that is well-regarded by them. Engagement is regular and continuous, contributing to a good shared understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve. The Council engages effectively with diverse communities.
- 10 The Council performs well in achieving and improving value for money and its resources are used cost effectively. It has delivered savings and efficiency gains in excess of targets, achieving its three-year Gershon targets a year early and is making significant gains in procuring passenger transport and on waste and recycling.
- 11 The Council has the capacity to deliver its priorities effectively. The Council is strengthening its approach to organisational development and customer access. Corporate governance is sound and political decision making is transparent. The workforce is generally well trained and motivated. Work with the Centre for Public Scrutiny is underway to improve the scrutiny process; and the Council is enhancing councillors' engagement in their geographical areas through the new community forum mechanism, though this is in its early stages. The Council used an innovative approach to swapping funding streams with the new PCT to bolster the cash available to delivering health services.

- 12 The Council, with its partners, has delivered significant community benefits across the shared priorities. Progress has been good against economic, social and community safety agendas. On school attainment, Key Stage 3 results in 2006 were outstanding and above similar authorities, making Leicestershire one of the top five performing authorities in the country. At Key Stage 4 results are improving and above GCSE national averages when English and maths are included. Economic activity has increased continually since 2003, creating more jobs with significant inward investment achieved. The Ageing Well emphasis is leading to a reduction in delayed discharges, the improvement of direct payments and increased benefits take-up. Partnership working to deliver reduced youth crime and reduced fear of crime is successful as are aspects of the healthier communities' agenda such as improved levels of exercise. However, partnership working on a county wide basis to reduce waste collected has been less effective to date and road safety remains a challenge. Overall, these achievements show a willingness and ability to work in partnership to achieve tangible benefits for the community.

Areas for improvement

- 13 The Council needs to ensure that its excellent relationships with most stakeholders are replicated with its district councils. Although operational cooperation between the Council and the districts exists, not all districts are satisfied with relationships at a strategic level.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	4
	Prioritisation	3
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3
	Performance management	3
What has been achieved?	Achievement	3
Overall corporate assessment score**		3
*Key to scores		
1 – Below minimum requirements – inadequate performance		
2 – At only minimum requirements – adequate performance		
3 – Consistently above minimum requirements – performing well		
4 – Well above minimum requirements – performing strongly		

**Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score

Scores on five themes	Overall corporate assessment score
Two or more themes with a score of 4 None less than score of 3	4
Three or more themes with a score of 3 or more None less than score of 2	3
Three or more themes with a score of 2 or more	2
Any other combination	1

Context

The locality

- 14 Leicestershire is in the East Midlands and is part of the Three Cities area (the Regional Assembly planning classification) where Leicester, Nottingham and Derby, and the towns and countryside of the three counties around them, have strong functional linkages. This is supported by good transport infrastructure including the M1, rail links and East Midlands Airport. Loughborough, the County's biggest town, sits in the middle of the Three Cities area and has an internationally regarded University. The Leicester travel to work area encompasses much of the County while Hinckley in the south west of the County has strong links with parts of Warwickshire and the West Midlands.
- 15 The environment is one of contrasts. The eastern side is predominantly rural, with small villages and market towns, whilst the north and north west is more urban. There are historic hotspots of lower employment such as north west Leicestershire (a former coalfield area) and action by partners in bodies such as the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP) are tackling this. Charnwood Forest is a regionally distinctive and important landscape and the north west of the County is within the National Forest area. Approximately a third of Leicestershire's economically active population live in settlements classed as 'rural' with 80 per cent of the total land area classed as 'farmed'. The Principal Urban Area of Leicester stretches beyond the City administrative area into Leicestershire encompassing Oadby and Wigston as well as parts of neighbouring Blaby, Charnwood and Harborough. The main other centres of population are the towns of Loughborough (57,560 people), Hinckley (38,620) and Coalville (32,030).
- 16 The county has a growing population of approximately 633,000 and this is projected to rise to approximately 714,000 by 2029. In particular the 50+ years age group is projected to grow and the 25 to 44 age population to decline over the next 20 years. The population has a higher life expectancy than the national average, is healthier than average (apart from binge drinking), has less economically inactive people than the regional and national average, has hotspots of violent crime, and has a higher percentage of people living in owner-occupied accommodation than either the regional and national average.
- 17 People from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities made up just over 7 per cent of the population in 2004, with the largest groups being of Asian or Asian British origin (4.4 per cent). Among white minority groups there are significant communities of Irish and Eastern European origin, as well as groups of gypsies and travellers, refugees and asylum seekers. Migration out of Leicester City, together with the arrival of economic migrants, is leading to more diverse communities.

- 18 Leicestershire is ranked 136 out of 149 metropolitan, unitary and county authorities in England for deprivation (where 1 is the most deprived). Whilst much of the County is relatively affluent, small areas of relative deprivation exist.
- 19 Leicestershire has a relatively thriving economy and the predominant sectors are distribution, hotels and restaurants, manufacturing and public administration, education and health. Economic change continues to affect restructuring of the local economy. The main growth is predicted to be in the communications and business services.

The Council

- 20 The Council has been in Conservative control since 2001 after two decades of having no political party with overall control. The Council operates under the Leader and Cabinet Model of executive arrangements. Decisions are taken by the Cabinet collectively. A Scrutiny Commission, chaired by the Leader of the major opposition party, heads the overview and scrutiny function. It is supported by five scrutiny committees and a series of time-limited review panels.
- 21 The Chief Executive, four service directors, the Director of Corporate Resources and the County Solicitor make up the Corporate Management Team. The four service departments cover Highways, Transportation and Waste Management, Children and Young People, Adult Social Care and Community Services. Much of the economic development function is contracted out, together with tourism promotion and marketing, to two partnerships operating across the County and the City of Leicester. Unusually for a county, the Council operates an extensive Museums service.
- 22 The Council receives a low level of government funding, yet over the last two years, council tax increases have been in the lowest quartile for all counties.
- 23 The Council employs approximately 23,000 people across a range of services. The revenue budget for 2007/08 is £607m (including schools).
- 24 In December 2004 the Council was rated 'excellent' following a Corporate Re-assessment. In the 2005 and 2006 CPA ratings, the Council was awarded four stars and Social Care Services have been awarded the highest three star rating for the last five years.
- 25 The new Children and Young People's Service was rated in the Annual Performance Assessment in 2006 as having excellent capacity to improve. The same assessment rated the Council's Children's Social Care Services as excellent. Education Services were rated as good, having shown substantial improvement since summer 2005. The 2007 APA shows continued improvement. The Culture Services block was rated four.

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

Ambition

- 26 The Council is performing strongly in this area. With its partners across the county and the sub-region, it has developed clear and challenging ambitions that reflect the needs and diversity of their communities. The Council is recognised as a leader through its councillors and managers, at a regional and national level, with international leadership shown through its links with China. Ambitions are informed by comprehensive knowledge of what is important to citizens. It has a well informed and long-term approach to issues and challenges and is constructive in its approach to managing and working in complex partnerships. It is playing a pivotal role in place shaping.
- 27 Consultation to inform the Council's and its partners' ambitions for Leicestershire has been thorough and inclusive. Robust consultation was undertaken to develop the Leicestershire Community Strategy which involved statutory and non-statutory stakeholders and residents, including six discussion groups, a young persons' citizens' jury, and a quality of life questionnaire through 'Leicestershire's Voice', the citizen's panel. The views of minority and diverse populations are accessed routinely including young people, BME communities, people with disabilities and travellers. Residents' priorities were identified as children and young people; traffic and transport; and crime and community safety and these informed the strategy. New community forums to strengthen residents' consultation further are being developed to cover 27 areas and will enhance the knowledge of residents' needs at a local level. In addition Neighbourhood Forums are being set up in 19 priority areas of greatest need with aims of reducing crime and the fear of crime; achieving greater satisfaction with the local environment; increasing social capital and social cohesion; and improving health. Views from each Neighbourhood Forum will inform the appropriate Community Forum. This approach to consultation and engagement ensures that the Council's ambitions are continually relevant to the area and provide a strong basis for place shaping.

- 28 The Council is playing a pivotal role in clarifying what needs to happen to improve the social, economic and environmental needs of the area and is clearly articulating its vision and aims for the medium and long-term in cross-cutting strategies that are agreed with its partners. The Council has identified long-term sustainable outcomes across the sub-region. It is now leading the development of a new Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and a new LAA for the county which is building on the existing clarity and agreement with partners on what is needed for the county and region, and preparing for the next stage of the LAA. In the meantime a range of long-term strategies covering the needs of specific groups and local issues are already in place such as for older people, a rural strategy (until 2026), urban strategies (for example, for Coalville until 2027), and sub-regional economic development plans (until 2020). An example is the Ageing Well Strategy in which the needs of older people until 2022 are articulated including the differing needs of urban and rural older people. For rural older people, these needs include access to services and facilities (quality housing, health services, education, and employment opportunities), supported by high quality transport and information services. Another example is the vision for the economic development of poorer urban areas such as Coalville, which includes that by 2027 it will be a distinctive, contemporary market town that provides a full range of retail, community and leisure services for residents. The broader economic development vision is then reflected in the sub-regional economic development plans relating for example to addressing low skills. This fits with the Council's and partners' longer term vision in terms of what Leicestershire will be like with more high skilled jobs and a better educated population. Long-term strategies and visions for the future mean that it is clear how the Council and partners are addressing local and national issues and what they aim to achieve for Leicestershire.
- 29 Ambitions for the community address the underlying needs of the area well and are underpinned by stretching and challenging targets in the high priority areas. Leicestershire Together (LT), the Local Strategic Partnership aims to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the County and its people. The current county-wide Leicestershire Community Strategy, developed by LT, identifies the key aims. These are set out under three key, cross-cutting themes: a vibrant and thriving county in which to live work and play; a county where all have access to quality services; and, a county which looks to the future by maximising opportunities for its young people. The Council's MTCS then translates the LT ambitions into council ambitions. It covers three key, cross-cutting themes - improving the quality of life for people; improving the quality of life in communities; and improving services so that they are high quality and value for money. The Council aims to achieve its ambitions in these areas through, for example, becoming a top performer and exemplar in education by a range of interventions and support to schools, as well as using BSF and other Government funding to transform learning in the County; in reducing smoking, increasing participation in exercise, improving rural living through better access to services including improved transport, and valuing older people as active contributors to society rather than as dependants.

- 30 The Council has a track record of responding well to issues of concern to residents. In recent years, key challenges have been the loss of low-skilled manufacturing industries such as knitwear, the closure of coal pits, and the decline of the agricultural industry in the rural community. The Council delivered well on its last Community Strategy by reducing unemployment in former coalfield areas like north west Leicestershire, boosting tourism, particularly sustainable tourism, and through links with the China Trade Bureau have created new jobs. There is now a relatively thriving economy county-wide supported by service industries, distribution, hotels, manufacturing, public administration, education and health.
- 31 The Council is effective in sharing good quality data with partners to enable sound decisions to be made. It places a high priority on working with partners to establish sound mechanisms for data and intelligence gathering and analysis. These partnerships include the Leicestershire On-Line Research Atlas (LSORA), the police-led Leicestershire and Rutland Statistics and Research Co-ordinating Group (SARCOG) and the Information Management Advisory Group (IMAG). The new SCS, which will identify the priority outcomes to be included in the new LAA, will be focused on three sets of evidence - 'This is Leicestershire', structured around the seven LAA/theme partnerships and including a high level analysis of citizen/user needs and priorities; 'Places in Leicestershire', based on data and user information and prepared jointly with District Councils; and a high level partnership area-wide risk assessment. These arrangements ensure that partners' understanding of changing needs is constantly refreshed.
- 32 The Council is providing strong and effective leadership. Political and managerial leadership is effective and well regarded. The leader, senior councillors and senior managers play an active and influential role in championing the needs of the county in terms of economic development, community safety and rural affairs. The Council, with Leicester City Council, has been quick to pick up on the idea of a multiple area agreement (MAA) and to bring it forward. The business message is that counties and cities within the region are one financial force, and these councils are all keen to reflect this. The Council also works well with nine single tier and county council authorities in the area, supported and commended by Government Office of the East Midlands (GOEM) and the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA). The Council initiated the East Midlands - China Trade Bureau which has supported 400 businesses to trade with China, creating new jobs. The chief executive has given personal drive to increase sports and exercise through his work with Loughborough University, with its national reputation in sport; and through finding an innovative solution to helping the PCT's finances. The Council's leadership is strong locally, regionally and through the growing international links.

16 Corporate Assessment | What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 33** The legacy of sometimes difficult relationships with district councils is not fully resolved. There are operational successes working with district councils, such as on decriminalised parking and on concessionary fares. At a strategic level there is an underdeveloped relationship that relates to the period before the recent elections. This legacy has resulted in little progress to date with district councils in areas such as combining the back-office functions of a large number of authorities, thereby increasing efficiency and effectiveness. As a result, progress on strategic developments with district councils awaits improved relationships.

- 34 The Council provides strong community leadership, tackling difficult issues in an inclusive but purposeful way. A range of difficult measures have been adopted to improve results at KS4. These include replacing some headteachers and appointing or commissioning School Improvement Partners to schools to support and challenge leadership of schools. The Council's capacity to undertake widespread consultation and take difficult decisions has been demonstrated through, for example, closing one underperforming school and reorganising secondary education in the Vale of Belvoir and Melton Mowbray. The latter was the result of widespread consultation and engagement with schools, children and young people, parents and the wider community. The Council has taken a firm stance in its prolonged negotiations with district councils that eventually led to agreement on contentious issues such as decriminalised parking and concessionary fares. It has also a policy on a claw-back on school budget surpluses where the Council has set clear limits on the level of money held back so as to use any level above that limit for other council priorities. The Council therefore shows that it can take and maintain unpopular decisions where it believes it is the correct thing to do in the interests of the wider community.

Prioritisation

- 35 The Council performs well in this area. Priorities reflect the views and needs of the county's communities well and are appropriately focused on local and national issues. Consultation is extensive, effective and is used to monitor progress with regular surveys of citizens and users. There are clear and robust plans in place to deliver the priorities, with partners. Resources are allocated accordingly. The Council has been rigorous and successful in its approach to delivering its priorities over time.
- 36 Council priorities have been well formed and influenced by widespread consultation. The Council listens to the needs of its communities including hard to reach groups and consultation has affirmed the priorities for the next three years, balancing national and local priorities, and addressing the needs of minority communities. The Council has developed clear priorities for its own services against the three MTCS ambitions, and a number of high priority targets (35 in all).

On 'Improve quality of life for people', consultation clarified that residents wanted a range of improvements such as better access to services such as education, as well as helping people to remain independent. The priority areas are:

- children and young people - with five high priority targets, such as 10 per cent of schools being in the top 5 per cent nationally at Key Stage 2 by 2009;
- older people - with four high priority targets - such as support more older people to live at home through increasing attendance allowance claims by 29 per cent by 2009; and
- vulnerable adults and carers - with four high priority targets such as a 48 per cent per year increase of people with mental ill-health and learning disabilities receiving direct payments.

18 Corporate Assessment | What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

37 On 'Quality of life in communities', consultation clarified that residents wanted an improved environment, to feel part of the decision-making process, have a sense of community spirit and have equality of access to services in their areas. The priority areas are:

- culture and leisure - with two high priority targets - such as achieve 20 new or substantially improved libraries by 2009;
- transport - with four high priority targets - such as a 22 per cent reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads in 2008;
- environment and waste management - with four high priority targets - such as meet the seven key outcomes in the county environment strategy by 2009; and
- safer communities - with eight high priority targets - such as a reduction of first time entrants to the youth justice system by 6 per cent by 2009.

On 'Improve services so that they are high quality and value for money', consultation clarified that residents wanted the promotion of equality in services as well as providing services at a time and manner they expect. The priority areas are:

- quality, customers and diversity - with four high priority targets - such as an increase of BME employees in the council workforce of 5.5 per cent by 2009; and an increase of 25 per cent in hours the council can be contacted for services, by 2009.

38 The priority targets are strongly integrated into corporate and service plans and are SMART. There are strong links between the community strategy, the MTCS and business plans, which are then reflected in team and individual plans. There is a wide commitment to delivering the priorities across the Council and priorities and priority targets are clear to all, and provide a strong basis for delivering improvements in a coordinated way to enable their achievement. SMART targets cover the period until 2009 and are challenging including:

- increase council tax benefit recipients by 3400 (17.5 per cent);
- the provision of 24 Children's Centres by 2008; and
- increase recycling and household waste diverted from landfill from 40 per cent in 2004/05 to 60 per cent in 2008/09.

Corporate and service plans also include partnership priorities, such as the LAA targets and demonstrate how activities will help deliver community and corporate ambitions. As a result of clear and strong links between strategies and outcomes at different levels, the Council and partners have a sound base from which to deliver improved services to the community.

- 39 The Council and partners take robust action to move resources from lower to higher priorities. Work with partners and residents has informed the Council's decision-making in allocating resources and stakeholders are clear about the prioritisation decisions the Council makes. Resources have been shifted to meet new priorities, and the MTFS includes service improvement growth of £10.4 million over the three-year period to 2009. To achieve the investment in priorities the MTFS includes over £14 million of cashable efficiency savings. To achieve this, budgets were rigorously reviewed in order to identify savings from lower priorities. Potential service reductions and increases were assessed against a range of criteria such as the ranking of a priority, the anticipated impact on client groups, and how services benchmarked against other authorities. The key areas for savings are clear and specified, and include a reduction in Adult and Community Learning, homes for older people (linked to additional extra care), and a reduction in number of Council-owned country parks and land holdings. Resources have also been increased through partnerships, such as using private sector and (East Midlands Development Agency) EMDA funding to create the new library at Mountsorrel. The Council and partners therefore enable service improvements to occur where these are identified as priorities.
- 40 The Council takes robust action to deliver its strategy including its priorities. Although service performance is generally high and reflected in high satisfaction figures this is not universally the case. Satisfaction with the council (BV3) and satisfaction with public transport information (BV103) are both at bottom quartile. In response, the Council has worked with MORI to analyse the reasons for this and taken appropriate action. This includes a range of strategies including benchmarking against top performers, further surveys by MORI, and a review of marketing plans to feed in any improvements as result of the analysis. Marketing of web and telephone opportunities is increasing access to public transport information and the Council continues to pursue a positive programme of press releases and publicity campaigns. The Council has also set an explicit target to increase satisfaction in public transport information to 54 per cent by 2009/10. The Council confronts areas needing improvement and challenges itself to improve.

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

Capacity

- 41 The Council performs well in this area. It ensures that it has sufficient capacity to deliver its priorities and a VFM culture in the organisation is evident. The Council is strengthening its approach to meet future challenges and sustain continuous improvement through an ambitious change management programme.
- 42 The roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers are clearly understood and carried out effectively. Relationships between councillors and officers are appropriate and constructive. Political and managerial leadership is effective both within the Council and in partnership. Executive members have a good knowledge of their portfolios and a focus on delivering corporate priorities. The constitution successfully underpins these relationships. Decision making is open and transparent and decisions are timely, consistent and result in appropriate actions. Meetings are open to the public and full council meetings are 'web-cast'. The Council can demonstrate that it takes account of human rights; for example, in developing its approach to anti-social behaviour efforts were made to avoid criminalising young people unnecessarily. The Standards Committee is effective and high ethical standards are maintained. All councillors have had training in the new Code of Conduct. The Corporate Governance Committee is working well in contributing to risk management within the organisation. Clear accountability and sound understanding of roles and responsibilities help councillors and managers work effectively together to deliver services and improvement.
- 43 Overview and scrutiny is making an effective contribution to improvement in some areas but there is scope for further development. Examples of improvements made are in the school meals service, the review of the capital programme and the development of the arts strategy. There is evidence of impact in challenging performance but some councillors indicate that an area for their personal development is understanding and interpreting performance and budget information more effectively. The Council is working with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (the CfPS) to progress improvement.
- 44 Councillors have good support for their personal development. A Personal Development Review (PDR) is undertaken, by an external facilitator, which informs the overall training plan and learning and development is overseen by a cross party working group. A range of development opportunities are available. There are plans in place to address gaps in knowledge for example regarding equality standards.

- 45 The Council's financial position and financial management are strong. Financial standing is good; the budget setting process is strong and adequate reserves are maintained. The Council implemented Job Evaluation in March 2003 and continues to monitor the situation through equal pay audits. In this way the Council is taking action to ensure it has the financial capacity to deliver priorities.
- 46 The Council achieves and improves value for money. There is good overall service performance delivered at low total expenditure. Efficiency gains in excess of targets have been achieved including three-year Gershon targets a year early. The Council is driving further efficiency through an ambitious five year 'Strategic Change Programme' ranging from improving access to services via the 'customer first' project, to developing a strategic approach to HR, procurement and asset management. The Council is applying business re-engineering principles to its services and an early outcome is an integrated passenger transport and fleet management unit. The programme is being effectively project managed to time and budget and has achieved £1.6 million in efficiency gains in its first year.
- 47 Procurement is strong. For example significant savings have been made in procuring passenger transport and waste and recycling services. The Council has recently established a 'category management' approach to procurement. Category Managers with expertise in an area, for example information technology, co-ordinate category requirements across the council, advice services and work to consolidate and enhance savings through contracting and purchasing. Category managers are already working directly with ESPO (East Shires Purchasing Organisation - a long standing purchasing and distribution consortium with six other councils) to further enhance procurement gains. A strong VFM approach is contributing to cost effectiveness.
- 48 The Council works effectively in strategic partnerships but shared delivery of services within the county is underdeveloped. Partnerships such as LT and the economic development partnership are delivering significant outcomes for local people, for example through the LAA. The Council and its partners are successful in securing the financial capacity to deliver shared priorities. External funding has been achieved, for example, £14.7 million government funding for a by-pass to contribute to road safety and over £1.5 million to support the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP). In March 2007 the Council came to an innovative financial arrangement with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) which equated to a significant reduction in the PCT's 2006/07 deficit. This allowed the PCT to progress its recovery plan and contribute to partnership health priorities. Effort is being made to develop more effective relationships with local district councils in order to progress the shared services agenda. Among proposals is further development and extension of the existing network of joint customer contact centres to improve access to services for local people, including the development of the role of improved local libraries in being the first point of contact. Whilst discussions continue, plans are more advanced with neighbouring county councils. For example a feasibility study is in progress for shared support services. Collaborative partnership working supports efficient use of collective resources.

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- 49** Risk management is continuing to develop well. An established framework and processes are being applied and risk is being identified and managed effectively within the Council. Risk management is progressing with partners through the LAA and some partners have been involved in challenge to the Council's corporate risk register. A further programme of training is taking place for staff and councillors to reinforce the corporate approach.
- 50** The Council has effective HR practices that ensure that it has sufficient capacity to deliver services. Sickness absence has decreased from an average of 9.34 days lost in 2004/05 to 8.15 in 2005/06, which is best quartile performance, and staff turnover at 9.9 per cent is below the county average of 12.5 per cent. The Council is working towards level 3 of the equality standard (17 per cent of councils are at level 3 or above) by implementing improvements to the equality impact assessment process. The Council takes steps to improve staff skills; using the opportunity of the change programme to share business analysis and project management skills across the organisation and working with the National College for School Leadership to help senior teachers to progress into headship. In this way, the future needs of the organisation are being anticipated and addressed.
- 51** The Council is performing well in having an overall workforce that is representative of the local community. It is committed to further improvement, particularly encouraging women into senior management, and has introduced initiatives such as representative recruitment panels, a new gender equality scheme and the 'Work Well' project to increase and promote flexible working practices. A coaching and mentoring scheme for BME and disabled employees is in place and has been praised by participants though the Council has not tracked individuals to assess career progression. These practices are supporting diversity in the workplace.
- 52** A corporate approach to human resource management is developing but there is still more to do on workforce planning. A new model of HR is being implemented, involving the creation of 'Business Partners' and the development of an Employee Service Centre, supported by the appointment of a new head of Strategic HR and a new Head of Shared Services. This is to build on current practices which, though sound, have had a departmental focus. The new approach is intended to promote consistency across the organisation, eliminating any duplication. New strategies for people and performance, workforce development and talent management are in place though revised learning and development and recruitment and selection policies are in development. A council wide approach to workforce planning is in the early stages and has not fully considered the potential contribution or needs of partners. A strategic approach to people management maximises capacity and allows an organisation to respond flexibly to new challenges.

- 53** The Council has an effective IT infrastructure which it is developing further. Among improvements in 2006/07 was the introduction of electronic social care records and intranet developments. The Council is investing £2.7million over five years in 'customer first' to improve telephone, in person and web access to the public for example by implementing a CRM (customer relationship management) system. Investing in information technology supports efficient and accessible service delivery.
- 54** The Council is actively supporting the development of the voluntary sector. It is working with local organisations to develop arrangements with clearer roles and responsibilities that will allow better engagement in partnership working. Consultation on proposed options is taking place. Representatives of the sector have been encouraged to lead the 'Stronger Communities' element of the LAA. Enhanced capacity in the voluntary sector supports more effective partnership working in meeting the needs of local communities.

Performance management

- 55** The Council is performing well. The Council's approach to performance management is thorough and is inclusive of all partners. Service users and residents influence developments and are able to monitor the Council's performance. Performance information is used at all levels within the Council but is not always used consistently to drive improvement.
- 56** The Council and its partners have an effective set of arrangements by which to manage performance. The Council and its partners' plans are managed at a strategic level by Leicestershire Together and at corporate level within the partnership organisations. They know how well they and each other are performing against planned outcomes through TEN, the partnership's data collection software. LT receives quarterly performance information on progress on delivering LAA targets and partners also have access to data through LSORA and SARCOG. Data collection in TEN is against each of the LAA targets but can be interrogated further, for example by ethnic group or community area.
- 57** The Council uses data effectively to inform target setting and to monitor against its targets to drive improvement. Members are actively involved in the performance management process. There is a Cabinet member with lead responsibility for performance management, a Scrutiny Commission which oversees scrutiny committees and their five-member panels. Lead members for the service areas also take an active role in performance management and receive information in a timely fashion whether as quarterly committee reports or monthly information and in this way they are able to contribute to driving improvement.

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- 58** The Council coordinates performance management well. At the corporate level the Corporate Performance and Improvement Board takes a strategic oversight and departmental and service managers receive monthly information and use it to ensure that targets will be met. For example, councillors and officers in Children's Services review pupil attendance at school level and then target specific schools to improve attendance. As a result, actions are taken where specific circumstances merit them.
- 59** Performance management is embedded across the organisation. Corporate priorities are reflected in departmental and service plans and in individual targets which are monitored through the personal development review process. Performance review is an integral part of corporate and departmental activity. The corporate annual plan and annual service plans include a review of the previous year's plans and build on these in the following year's targets.
- 60** A robust approach to benchmarking, particularly in priority areas, and performance data helps the Council achieve continuous improvement. The Council uses benchmarking and performance data effectively to identify areas of comparatively poor performance. For example, passenger transport was identified as being high cost. Following a review the three services managing passenger transport were re-organised into a single Passenger Transport Unit resulting in savings of £300,000 in 2006/07, increasing to £650,000 in 2007/08. In children's services progression from key stage three to key stage four was identified as an area of underperformance with some schools performing less well than others. By targeting support overall improvement was achieved at a faster rate than nationally and one school saw an improvement of 10 percentage points in one year as a result of targeted action.
- 61** The Council is effective in working in partnership to address underperformance. For example, monitoring performance of the local area CDRPs (crime and disorder reduction partnerships) in Leicestershire highlighted particular concern in one area. A pilot project led to improvements in the way the CDRP works and this is having a positive impact on performance. The Council and its partners have used this piece of work as a pilot to identify issues and improve performance across the area.
- 62** The Council is open and outward looking and uses external challenge to drive improvement. The Council commissioned the Local Government Leadership Centre to review corporate management in 2006 and this led to the coaching of Cabinet members. The Council has engaged the Centre for Public Scrutiny to review the Council's scrutiny function in order to improve scrutiny's performance. It commissioned MORI to undertake a satisfaction survey in both 2006 and 2007 in relation to transport to help it shape services, for example for vulnerable groups. The group most satisfied with public transport in 2007 is the under 18s, traditionally a group that expressed dissatisfaction with transport. The Council uses challenge in its drive for continual improvement.

- 63** User focus is well understood, and is used effectively to shape service delivery and measure performance within the Council. The Council has robust customer feedback mechanisms and staff reported that they felt able to submit complaints, grievances or representations and that should they do so these would be treated appropriately. The Council uses customer comments and complaints, both formal and informal to drive service improvements. The provision of an accessible disabled toilet in the library at Melton Mowbray, for example, was a direct result of customer comments. And the 'grumble sheets' used in children's homes and the primary pupil referral unit led to the provision of additional play equipment at the pupil referral unit. The Council is developing a customer service centre in part to enable it to use customer feedback at corporate level to drive further improvement.
- 64** Residents, users and young people are able to influence policy and have a good picture of how well the Council is performing. The Council employs a number of mechanisms to engage its communities which include the Council's newspaper 'Leicestershire Matters' and an informative website. Through the website residents also have access to both the Leicestershire On-line Research Atlas (LSORA) and TEN, the data collection software operated by the Council and its partners which enables residents to interrogate data about the partnership's performance. Young people are kept informed through The Jitty, a Council supported website produced by young people. The Council operates an active Citizens' Panel and young people are also engaged through CYCLe, which has, for example, persuaded the Council to review how it supports district youth councils in order to ensure the views of young people from all parts of the county are heard. Parish councils are supported through the Leicestershire Rural Partnership and the Council is also establishing 27 Community Forums across the county to facilitate dialogue. These fora are already influencing the Council's long-term planning. The Council consults with specific communities for particular purposes, for example, on secondary school reorganisation in the Vale of Belvoir and Melton Mowbray; and with users of home care services on what they receive and has altered proposed provision in light of these consultations. The engagement of users enables the Council to provide responsive services.
- 65** The use of performance information to monitor and manage improvement is not wholly consistent. The Council does not have a robust approach to managing service improvements where the provider is outside the Council such as a voluntary organisation, or other public sector provider. For example monitoring quality in voluntary organisation youth work is under developed and the Council has not used the information it has to ensure equity of access to child and adolescent mental health services to improve young people's wellbeing. Without a consistent approach the Council cannot ensure that all aspects of its work deliver continual improvements for the people of Leicestershire.

What has been achieved?

- 66 The Council is performing well in this area. It is achieving significantly across the shared priority areas and the three key, cross-cutting themes - improving the quality of life for people; improving quality of life in communities; and improving services so that they are high quality and value for money. As a result, residents benefit from improved services.
- 67 The Council can demonstrate clear improvements against the priority areas underpinning its three cross-cutting themes. In relation to 'improving quality of life for people' there are improvements for children and young people, older people and vulnerable adults and carers. Outcomes for children and young people in Leicestershire are good and in some instances outstanding. This is achieved despite low levels of funding. Key Stage 3 results in 2006 were outstanding and above similar authorities, making Leicestershire one of the top five performing authorities in the country. For older people, achievements include increased take-up of Direct Payments and the creation of 100 'no cold calling zones'. And for vulnerable adults and carers, successes include an additional 1,100 people receiving Telecare to support independent living.
- 68 The Council is effective in enhancing 'quality of life in communities' in a range of ways. Successes include the provision of a range of museums and increased sports activity, and a network of at least an hourly rural bus within an 800 metre walk of 95 per cent of residents. However the waste management strategy has yet to produce low levels of waste collected although there are high levels of recycling. Crime in the county is decreasing over time though recent performance indicators for the different crime types show a mixed performance. Road safety remains a challenge with incidents of people being killed or seriously injured on the roads being amongst the worst 25 per cent nationally.
- 69 On 'quality, customers and diversity', successes include exceeding efficiency gains and a reduction in staff sickness, though the expected level 3 in the equalities standard has not been achieved on time. A new customer services centre is under development to improve access to council services and public satisfaction with the council remains bottom quartile. As a result, residents see improvements in many but not all services.

Sustainable communities and transport

- 70 The Council is making a strong and long-term contribution to the economic vitality of the area and has excellent transport services. Good work on housing is bolstered by the strategic use of land. Performance on environmental issues is mixed with recycling being amongst the best 25 per cent nationally but waste collected remaining amongst the worst 25 per cent.

- 71 The Council is making a major contribution to the economic well being of the county. While the Leicestershire economy is characterised by low unemployment, high skills and high levels of economic activity and employment, there are former hotspots of lower employment such as north west Leicestershire (a former coalfield area) and action by partners in bodies such as the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP) has reduced unemployment in that area from 7.5 per cent in 1996 to 1.5 per cent in 2007. Economic activity in the county between 2003 and 2006 has increased and the trend continues. This includes Learn2Earn employability programmes for unemployed people, business incubator units in partnership with Loughborough University, New Growth Point status and the China Bureau which has assisted over 400 local businesses to trade with China, resulting in the creation of jobs in the area, although it is not possible to quantify the number of such jobs created at this stage.
- 72 The Council is influencing the policies required to promote the provision of affordable housing. While not a housing authority, it uses its position at regional level to ensure that the development policies in the East Midlands Regional Assembly reflect the need to set aside a percentage of new development for affordable housing, including for future needs of an ageing population. It is also working on housing with district councils through the Local Development Frameworks and has completed 41 housing needs surveys for a rural housing enabler project. It is also developing extra care housing, and administers the Supporting People programme, to help people to sustain their tenancy despite a range of social and physical problems. As a result, there is a clear framework in place to increase the supply of affordable homes in the county as well as support the ability of residents to remain in their homes.
- 73 The Council and partners are tailoring future rural business support and grant programmes to reflect the differing needs and characteristics of the North/South and East/West areas of the County. They have a 2026 vision for rural Leicestershire and understand that to be achieved, existing and future interventions need to be developed to target programmes and resources, more effectively. A separate review of Rural Transport in Leicestershire has indicated a similar approach to delivery.
- 74 The approach to improving the environment in a sustainable way is adequate. A Climate Change strategy has been created and the Council has established an invest to save fund to save energy and water. Carbon dioxide emissions at County Hall have reduced by 21 per cent over the last three years and the Council has many examples of good practice in environmental purchasing. Waste is a priority for the Council and all the local authorities in Leicestershire adopted a revised Waste Management Strategy last year. Work on procuring a waste disposal facility by these partners is at an advanced stage. Current recycling rates are 42 per cent, which is in the top 25 per cent nationally. By contrast however, the amount of waste collected remains in the bottom 25 per cent though efforts to minimise waste are showing improved results. Residents' satisfaction with waste disposal is above average. The Council and partners are taking the right steps to improve the environment.

- 75 The Council's performance on transport is good. Marketing of web and telephone opportunities is increasing access to public transport information and the Council continues to improve community cohesion, such as through bus services in rural areas, where there is a network of at least an hourly rural bus within an 800 metre walk of 95 per cent of residents. There is high customer satisfaction with the highways services at 85 per cent and with 81 per cent satisfied with the overall road condition. 53 per cent of schools in the county have adopted travel plans along with 31 per cent of major employers. As a result, the Council and partners have achieved well in relation to transport matters.

Safer and stronger communities

- 76 The Council and its partners are achieving successful outcomes for most aspects of building safer and stronger communities. Crime is decreasing overall though challenges remain in some crime categories. Measures to reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) and fear of crime are succeeding and work on tackling drug abuse is improving. Offending behaviour by young people is reducing and community cohesion interventions are showing successful outcomes. However the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads remains amongst the worst 25 per cent nationally.
- 77 There is a mixed picture in terms of the trends in different crime categories. There has been a decrease of 4.5 per cent of crime overall in the period 2003/04 to 2006/07 with a decrease in overall vehicle crime of 39 per cent but an increase in robbery of 17 per cent over the same period. The incidence of domestic burglary, though in the worst 25 per cent, has recently improved. The number of racial incidents recorded continues to be comparatively high. Reporting of domestic violence increased by 12 per cent between 2002/03 and 2005/06 and reoffending has decreased from 512 in 2005/06 to 316 in 2006/07 and is on track to achieve the 2009 LAA reward target. The Council has responded to the views of the public and made 'reducing crime' a high priority target. Resources are being targeted into areas of rising crime and impact is being seen for example through targeting 'hot spot' areas such as student accommodation and the number of places where 'hate incidents' can be reported has increased.
- 78 The Council and its partners are having a positive impact on anti-social behaviour (ASB) and fear of crime. There has been a fall in residents perceiving there to be a high level of ASB in their area from 31 per cent in 2003 to 17 per cent in 2006. Of 122 people receiving an acceptable behaviour contract in 2006/07, 72 per cent did not re-offend. Preventative initiatives to help people feel safer include designation of 100 'no cold calling zones', a 'crime calendar' to remind people of safety issues, the 'signal bus' promoting safety for vulnerable people across the county and the 'Warning Zone' centre educating primary school children in how to be safe. The Council has, in partnership with districts, invested £500,000 in fifty additional police community support officers which are being deployed relative to need. An LAA target that less than 20 per cent of Leicestershire residents have a high level of worry about crime has been achieved.

- 79** Progress is being made in tackling drug and alcohol abuse though some challenging targets have not been met. The numbers of adults in treatment has risen from 520 in 2002/03 to 1301 in 2006/07 and the retention rate (more than 12 weeks in treatment) is 78 per cent (though performance is below target). In young people's services 91 per cent of assessments were completed in 5 days and 99 per cent of interventions were started within 10 days in 2006/07. Action is being taken with local businesses to prevent underage sales of alcohol. The perception of residents that drug dealing and using are a problem has fallen from 53 per cent in 2003 to 33 per cent 2006.
- 80** Engagement activities with young people are resulting in a reduction in offending behaviour. The number of young people offending for the first time has fallen by 8.5 per cent in 2006/07 from the previous year and the number re-offending has fallen by 12 per cent since 2002. Reoffending by Children Looked After has also reduced. Initiatives include mentoring by a team of volunteers, summer programmes and use of arts activities. A number of 'disengaged' young people have been encouraged to return to mainstream education.
- 81** While road safety is improving over time performance remains poor compared to other councils with a high incidence of road accidents. In the last ten years there has been a 26 per cent reduction of adults and a 45 per cent decrease in children killed and seriously injured together with a 30 per cent reduction in serious injuries on 'A' roads. However in 2005/06, 302 people were killed or seriously injured which remains amongst the worst 25 per cent nationally. Activity is being targeted to 'hot spot' areas and at risk groups. Investment of £500,000 has been made into two A roads and these have been named in the 15 most improved roads in Britain. Driving courses are being offered to young and older drivers and safety campaigns have focussed on motorcyclists. The Council is investing a further £5 million in road safety improvements over the next four years.
- 82** Emergency planning is fit for purpose. Council business continuity plans are in place; testing has improved but off-site storage of information is in development. Emergency plans have been used successfully such as in a recent incident of loss of water for 24,000 people in Coalville. The Chief Executive has taken a leading role in raising the profile of emergency planning. A reorganisation of the Local Resilience Forum has been undertaken to improve the development and delivery of some plans such as dealing with mass fatalities.

- 83 The Council and partners are tackling well the need to build stronger communities. The Stronger Communities Board of LT, led by the community and voluntary sector, has undertaken social capital surveys in 20 communities across the county to measure social cohesion. The Board is now leading improvement planning in these communities to address social tensions or isolation uncovered by the survey. The County Council has used profiles for the 19 priority neighbourhoods to identify a large number (51) of school exclusions in the Melton Mowbray area; young people who have been excluded are now tracked and engaged by the detached youth service, and offered taster sessions of educational and other activities. These actions are reducing the number of exclusions. The Council supports projects which address the needs of the diverse community and contribute to community cohesion, such as 'Dreamers' - a project for young asylum seekers and refugees which won the Philip Lawrence Award in 2005. It gives educational and social support including home visits. In addition, multi-national activities are encouraged such as team sports and anti-racism projects in schools. The Council supports the Leicestershire Rural Partnership which promotes community cohesion in rural communities such as encouraging social networking. The Council also supports a summer holiday programme (with Blaby) for disabled young people that is highly valued.

Healthier communities

- 84 The Council and partners deal well with many of the health challenges facing the county's population. Life expectancy for both men and women is higher than the national average and there is less health-related deprivation in the county than in England as a whole. Teenage pregnancy rates are generally reducing but binge drinking is a particular local challenge.
- 85 The Council's engagement with partners on developing healthier communities is good. The Council and its partners have clear objectives to improve health, particularly through joint work and targets in the LAA. The recent appointment of a Director of Public Health, jointly with the Primary Care Trust (PCT), is leading to an increasing understanding of health inequalities in the county, the development of an integrated health strategy, and a programme of work to underpin joint commissioning with the PCT. There had previously been gaps in joint working within the health economy, though this is recently improving with strong leadership being shown since the new PCT was created last year.

- 86 Health is improving as a result of the activities of the Council and its partners. Targets on jointly agreed public health priorities, which have been in place since 2004, have been brought forward into the LAA. Tobacco control and physical activity were prioritised given their links to premature death through cancer, circulatory and respiratory disease. On Tobacco Control, one focus is on reducing smoking prevalence among pupils at six schools serving deprived communities and among adults living in those areas that rank in the bottom 20 per cent for Leicestershire priority neighbourhoods. Tobacco Control for adults using smoking cessation services and those quitting achieved approximately 95 per cent of the target in quarter one of 2007/08. On increasing physical activity, the Council has created Active People Coordinator posts and four of the eleven posts are working across district local authority boundaries to focus on these hard to reach groups. Success measures on sport activity within the LAA include 4311 people to carry out exercise three times a week by 2009 and the Council and partners are on target to achieve this. Teenage pregnancies are lower than the national average, in part due to effective promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people involving well coordinated action by the Primary Care Trust and its partners.
- 87 The Council and partners are investing well in healthier lifestyles. The percentage of schools working towards healthy schools status has reached 90 per cent, reaching the national milestone eight months' early. Free swimming has been available throughout the County since April 2007 for Looked After Children (LAC), their carers, the children of carers and for disabled children who regularly attend a Special School. Cycle usage is improving through initiatives such as the Syston to East Goscote cycleway. Drug and alcohol services are adequate. The Council and partners are responding to the higher average incidence of binge drinking through an alcohol harm reduction strategy. Staff sickness absence rates are now at the best 25 per cent of councils nationally.
- 88 The Council is improving access to services for those most at risk of disadvantage. The Council and partners know which neighbourhoods experience health inequality and they target actions accordingly. Benefits take up campaigns are being targeted at older people particularly in relation to increase take of Attendance Allowance, Housing and Council Tax Benefits to help them to keep warm, eat healthily and have social interactions. The Breaking the Barriers scheme has increased the number of people with disabilities in work by 270 with a further 200 having taken up voluntary work opportunities. Mental health assessments, for both acute and non-acute cases, were carried out within the required time scales for all young people known to the Youth Offending Service and new ways of contacting young people on campaigns such as stopping smoking include using text messaging. The Council has expanded its network of community transport services which has resulted in a 30 per cent increase in journeys in 2006/07. The vast majority of pedestrian crossings now have full facilities for disabled people, improving accessibility. As a result of these initiatives, the needs of groups at risk of disadvantage are being better served.

Older people

- 89 There is a positive approach to older people. The Council and its partners are responding appropriately to the increasingly ageing population by identifying older people as a priority in the MTCS. A comprehensive strategy for older people is developing through 'Ageing Well in Leicestershire', a report that demonstrates an understanding of the needs of older people and maps the services already meeting those needs. The councillor nominated as the older people's champion is focused on the wider agenda for older people and is developing plans for how this service can be improved, particularly in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. This gives an organisational focus on improvement.
- 90 A strategic approach to older people's needs is developing well. It incorporates the 'seven dimensions of independence' approach as highlighted in the 'Ageing Well in Leicestershire' report. This report covers a range of issues based on people over the age of 50 - demography, geographical distribution of Leicestershire's older population, marital status and living arrangements, ethnicity, housing, health, labour market participation, income, wealth and deprivation, community safety, and rural issues. It therefore adopts an approach that goes beyond adult social care and is being used to inform LAA targets.
- 91 The Council and partners take appropriate action after consulting older people. The Council undertakes meaningful engagement with older people and their representative groups through a range of activities, including an older people's consultative network and older people are represented on key planning groups within the Primary Care Trust and Adult Social Care. The Council also has mechanisms to consult with older people through the Leicestershire Ethnic Elders Forum. In its review of housing needs the Council has consulted with service users and carers and taken their views into account in agreeing priorities for development and has used information on demographic trends, and housing needs surveys together with information on current provision to inform its plans. The recently established Community Forums allow the membership of other representative groups, for example the Older Persons' Network. The Council acted on consultation with the Older Persons' Network on the DALE (Decisions at Life's End) Project providing home support to people who wish to die at home rather than in hospital. Consequently, older people exercise influence over the actions of the council. As a result, the Council is taking the right steps to identify what to improve in the services to older people.

- 92 The Council and partners provide a good range of services to older people. SMART targets are now being set up for the LAA refresh which encourage volunteering, rambling, home safety groups, benefit take up, Leicestershire CareonLine (a service which encourages the take up of IT), improved library access and resources. These services include work with Age Concern and DWP leading to over £2 million of increased welfare benefits to local residents. This approach is designed to help people stay independent for as long as possible, which is what older people said they wanted. Leicestershire Care on Line (COL) website has 15,000 visitors per month. Since 2002, 300 people have been provided with equipment to access internet in home, 3000 users have been given internet access through COL, and research by Loughborough University established that 69 per cent would not have connected without COL and 76 per cent said it had a positive impact on their lives. The SIGNAL Bus scheme enabled an additional 1,100 people to receive Telecare last year supporting independent living. The take-up of Direct Payments for day services is increasing and the Council exceeded its LAA target for 2006/07 (85) but this still falls short of the 3 star average. Older People (aged 65 and over) receiving support from adult social care to live independently in their own homes is also third quartile nationally. There is a good partnership with police and the fire authority in terms of Home Safety, as a call by the Fire and Rescue Service to check on fire detectors will also take into account other things which might cause falls or other injuries, such as electric blankets, electrical wiring, and loose mats. Work between police and Trading Standards is reducing distraction burglaries and there 100 'no cold calling zones'. The Leicestershire Doorstep Calendar also has helpful safety advice for each month. Social care day centres and residential homes for older people also provide a number of volunteering opportunities for children and young people. In a number of instances, for example in Melton, day services are based in community facilities which are also used by a playgroup and a younger adult keep fit group, allowing members to meet and interact. Older people therefore are experiencing a wide range of improved services on the areas that they say are important.

Children and young people

- 93** Outcomes for children and young people in Leicestershire are good and in some instances outstanding. This is achieved despite low levels of funding. Key Stage 3 results in 2006 were outstanding and above similar authorities, making Leicestershire one of the top five performing authorities in the country. At Key Stage 4 results are improving and above GCSE national averages when English and maths are included. Unvalidated GCSE results for 2007 have improved further. The proportion of young people achieving five or more A* to C grades reached 60 per cent for the first time. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. There is an improving trend in the attainment of children looked after with achievement of one or more GCSE passes now above the national average. The proportion of young people who achieve a full level 2 qualification by age 19 has improved for three years consistently, to above average. Overall health outcomes for children and young people are better than similar authorities and national averages. For example there are higher breast-feeding and immunisation rates and better access to primary care. Teenage pregnancy rates are below the national and regional average.
- 94** Service management in Leicestershire is outstanding. It is characterised by high ambitions and a very strong commitment to achieve the best outcomes possible for children and young people. Priorities are effectively identified and underpinned by good needs analysis. Partnerships are very strong at both the strategic and operational levels. The council consistently delivers services for children and young people at a good level. Performance management is effective and the impact of the leadership and management of Children's Services is demonstrated by the good and improving outcomes achieved by Leicestershire's children and young people.
- 95** The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. There is effective promotion of healthy lifestyles. National and local targets in relation to the Healthy Schools Programme have been met. There is a strong commitment to reducing childhood obesity. Annual health assessments and dental checks of looked after children are in line with the national average. Access to mental health services for looked after children and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. However, non-specialist cases do not receive timely access to mental health services.

- 96** Children and young people appear safe and arrangements to ensure this are good. The Local Safeguarding Board (LSCB) is outstanding. It is tightly focused on child protection activity and has also successfully extended its brief to include the wider safeguarding agenda. Partnership working is very effective. Those at risk from abuse are protected very well by good professional practice and multi-agency work. The number of children on the child protection register has fallen as a result of good early intervention and effective preventative work. Child protection procedures are implemented well and practice is managed and audited effectively. All children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker and almost all reviews are carried out on time. The proportion of children who are looked after continues to reduce as a result of good preventative measures.
- 97** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. Most children and young people report they enjoy school. There is an improving trend in attainment at all key stages and standards are mostly above those of similar authorities and national averages. Carefully targeted and effective action has been taken to support school improvement in weaker schools. There has been an impressive reduction in the number of schools in any of the Ofsted categories of concern. No secondary schools are currently in a category of concern.
- 98** The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society and achieve economic well being is good. Children and young people are actively involved in developing the council's ambitions. Those from vulnerable groups are also effectively involved, for example children who are looked after have a voice through the T2C group. Rapid progress has been made in implementing the 13 to 19 strategy. More young people are remaining in education after 16 as a result of the effective introduction of a more varied curriculum between ages 14 to 16. Strong corporate parenting effectively promotes the economic well-being of young people who are looked after by the council.
- 99** The capacity of council services to improve is outstanding. There is a considerable track record of making improvements in priority areas. There is excellent leadership in Children's Services that has led to a rapid and successful programme of change. Leadership and management are strong at all levels and there is a robust strategy in place to ensure Leicestershire's workforce is well equipped to meet future challenges.

Appendix 1 - Framework for corporate assessment

- 1 This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2 The Council's self-assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
 - key documentation, including the Council's improvement plan;
 - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
 - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for Leicestershire County Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 26 September to 26 October 2007.
- 4 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the Council.