

Corporate Assessment

Gedling Borough Council
November 2008



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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 and improvement

Executive summary

- 3 Gedling Borough Council is performing well in most areas and is rated as 'good'.
- 4 The Council, together with its partners, has adopted a clear, understood, shared vision which is based on a good understanding of the local context and residents needs. The Borough's vision is aligned to the vision and priorities of the Council and to the Local Area Agreement (LAA) themes and links to national and regional priorities. But it is unclear what the Council aims to deliver over the longer term against the full range of its priorities. Strategies are in place to deliver priorities, but outcome focused targets are not consistently used. The Council has recently approved a new strategic corporate plan and is in the process of agreeing new targets to deliver its priorities. These also link to those of the LAA and will align to those of the new sustainable community strategy which is currently in development.
- 5 The Council listens to its residents. Results of its annual satisfaction survey feed into the corporate priority setting process. Consultation on budget setting has led to a decision to stop funding Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and the introduction of a weekly waste collection in the summer. At a local level, the Council works closely with its communities through area based initiatives, directed to the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This is resulting in delivery of actions and services to meet specific local needs.
- 6 Capacity is adequate. Good managerial leadership is in place with a focus on delivering priorities and service improvement, whilst increasing efficiency. Although now filled, a long standing vacancy at a strategic level has had an impact on the delivery of some strategic improvements. The capacity of councillors is underdeveloped. To support and develop individual councillors the Council is providing a range of training and development and is investing in developing community leadership capacity. The level of challenge by scrutiny councillors is not fully developed and although the Council manages strategic risks well, councillor awareness of risk is limited. Effective investment and use of ICT is delivering improved access to services. Development of the Council's website has increased self-service facilities, including booking leisure facilities and making payments. Effective partnership working is providing increased capacity and joint procurement is delivering efficiencies.
- 7 A strategic and integrated approach to equalities is not embedded. It has lacked strategic direction for some time and by the Council's own re-assessment it is only currently achieving level one of the Equality Standard for local government. There are examples of good practice, some equality impact assessments have been completed and the Council works well in specific local areas. But equalities and diversity are not fully integrated throughout the Council and action plans do not systematically meet the needs of black and minority ethnic communities and other groups at risk of disadvantage.

Executive summary

- 8** Financial capacity is sufficient to sustain performance. A clear and sustained focus on delivering value for money is in place and the Council has met targets for achieving savings. It has successfully attracted external funding to support its priorities particularly in community safety and services for young people.
- 9** Performance management does not help track progress against corporate priorities and improvement in performance indicators is below average. Challenge of performance, particularly by councillors, is underdeveloped and the quality of targets is variable. Formal analysis of complaints is not undertaken. But the performance framework is clear and there is a good integration of financial and performance information. There are examples of action being taken to address weaker performing areas, with improvements being made in planning and housing benefits, although action to improve sickness levels has only had limited impact. Performance management of partnerships is effective and the Council uses customer feedback to improve service delivery. The Council uses benchmarking and learns from external review to improve performance.
- 10** Services are of good quality and progress has been achieved across most priority areas. In priority areas the Council has achieved many of its targets, for example working with partners to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour; improving cleanliness within the Borough; and achieving high dry recycling rates. This is recognised by local residents with satisfaction levels good and improving with performance in the top 25 per cent of councils for sports and leisure facilities, planning service and for the Council overall. But, when compared to other councils the rate of improvement against national indicators is below average.

Areas for improvement

- 11** The Council should develop a strategic approach to diversity and equality. It needs to do this so that priorities and action plans systematically meet the needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and other groups at risk of disadvantage. It should ensure that this approach is applied across the Council and work with partners to develop a consistent approach. This includes developing a structured approach to carrying out and implementing equality impact assessments and ensuring results feed into service development. The Council should routinely analyse feedback from these groups. The Council should aim to meet level 3 of the Equality Standard or equivalent by March 2010.
- 12** The Council should develop clear outcome-based measures and targets for each of its priorities, ensuring that they are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and timely). The focus should be on measuring the community benefits achieved. This should help to improve performance management as it will provide the Council with more focused information to measure performance. Performance monitoring should be realigned to priorities so that it is easy for the Council to check whether it is achieving what it set out to do. Benchmarking should be undertaken to help councillors assess the Council's performance compared to other councils. Performance reports should be more visually accessible and focused on variances. The work of the performance review scrutiny committee should be reviewed to ensure effective challenge of performance and formal scrutiny of complaints, strategies and progress against key action plans. The policy review committee should link its work more closely to strategic priorities and to the cabinet's forward plan. This should help the Council to increase its pace of change and drive improvement at a rate similar to other councils.
- 13** The Council needs to help develop councillors to enable them to provide vision, challenge and support. It should analyse the needs of all individual councillors and deliver appropriate training so that they have the necessary leadership and organisational skills to drive the future challenging agenda of the Borough. Councillors need to be supported to further improve the scrutiny function and to encourage scrutiny members to be more challenging to the Executive. Councillors need to fully understand risk.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*	Weighted Score
What is the Council, together with its partners trying to achieve?	Ambition	3	6
	Prioritisation	2	4
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2	4
	Performance Management	2	4
What has been achieved?	Achievement	3	21
Overall Corporate Assessment Score **			39
*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			

**** Banding thresholds for determining CPA category**

Category	Required Score
Excellent	45-60
Good	36-44
Fair	28-35
Weak	21-27
Poor	20 or less

Context

The locality

- 14** The Borough of Gedling covers an area of 120 square kilometres in the heart of Nottinghamshire, bordering Sherwood Forest to the north, the River Trent to the south east and the City of Nottingham to the south west. It is mainly residential, serving the Greater Nottingham conurbation, but with a broad employment base including manufacturing, retailing, distribution and public services. Over 79 per cent of the 111,700 (ONS mid-year estimate, 2006) population live in the main towns of Arnold and Carlton (including Gedling and Netherfield). The remaining population live in the eleven parishes which mix former coalfield communities with relatively affluent commuter villages and cover 80 per cent of the Borough's area.
- 15** Economic prosperity, together with housing and spatial planning issues, is inextricably linked to the city of Nottingham with the key towns of Arnold and Carlton forming part of the Greater Nottingham conurbation.
- 16** Overall the Borough is relatively affluent. The Council is ranked 208 out of 354 councils in the index of multiple deprivation (2007), where one is the most deprived council. This is an improvement from 197 in the previous ranking (2004). At ward level no wards fall within the 10 per cent most deprived nationally; 13.6 per cent fall within the 20 per cent most deprived. There are pockets of more severe deprivation at area level including Netherfield, Daybrook and Warren Hill.
- 17** There is a higher than average population of pensionable age at 19.6 per cent, compared to a regional figure of 18.6 per cent and a national figure of 18.4 per cent. There is a correspondingly slightly lower than average 0 to 15 year old population. Life expectancy at birth is 81.1 years for women and 77.8 years for men. But there is a five-year gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas. Only one in ten adults have high levels of physical activity, one in four smoke and more than one in five are obese.
- 18** According to 2005 population estimates 7.3 per cent of the population are from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. The BME population is spread throughout the Borough. There has been a significant increase in migrant workers registered with employers based in the Borough, particularly from Poland, but not all of these live and work in the Borough.

Context

19 The Borough has a higher than average proportion of economically active residents compared with national and county levels. Ninety per cent of Gedling's working population work in the Nottingham conurbation. The Borough has low levels of unemployment. The current unemployment rate, according to the job seekers allowance claimant count rate in June 2008 was 1.7 per cent, compared with a regional figure of 2.1 per cent and a national figure of 2.2 per cent. Recorded crime in the Borough has consistently been comparatively high. Home ownership at 81 per cent is the highest in Nottinghamshire and well above the regional and national average. Less than 8 per cent of the population live in social housing, but the recent Nottingham housing market area assessment suggests demand for social housing will rise in the future.

The Council

- 20** The Council consists of 22 wards represented by 50 councillors. The Conservative group has had overall control since May 2007 with 28 seats, the Labour group and Liberal Democrats each have nine seats and the Independents four. Elections are held every four years. From 2003/07 the Council had no overall control, with the Conservatives and Labour each holding 21 seats. The Council operates a leader and cabinet system and the business of the Council is governed by a Cabinet of seven portfolio holders. Current responsibilities are: finance and ICT, leisure and youth, development and economic regeneration, direct services and property, safe and sustainable neighbourhoods, housing and health and customer services and efficiency. Two scrutiny committees replaced the previous three committee model in 2007: policy review scrutiny committee and performance review scrutiny committee. There are three decision making committees, responsible for decisions outside the Executive remit. These cover personnel and resources; planning; and licensing.
- 21** The Council employs 691 members of staff; 529 full time equivalents. Senior management responsibility is with a chief executive, deputy chief executive and eight heads of service. This structure has been in place since April 2007. The Council's net revenue budget for 2008/09 is £14.4 million and a capital budget of £8.3 million including housing revenue account. All major front-line services are delivered in-house; except for housing repairs.
- 22** In March 2008 tenants voted in favour of housing stock transfer. Transfer of the Council's 3,500 housing stock to Gedling Homes is due to take place later in 2008.
- 23** The challenges recognised by the Council for the Borough include an ageing population, health inequalities, greater social housing need, high crime and pockets of severe deprivation at area level. There are also issues around access to services for those in the rural parts of the Borough. With a significant net employment outflow from the Borough to Nottingham, the City's prosperity is critical to the Borough's overall economic well-being.
- 24** The Audit Commission assessed the Council as 'good' in 2003 (on a five point scale of poor, weak, fair, good and excellent).

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

Ambition

- 25** The Council is performing well in this area. The Council and its partners have a shared vision for the Borough, based on a range of data and information gathered through consultation and partnership working. There is clear alignment between the community strategy and Local Area Agreement (LAA) themes and these themes link to Council ambitions. Ambitions are underpinned by plans to ensure delivery and the Council is delivering the ambitions of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The Council works effectively in partnership and community leadership in specific localities is good. But there is uncertainty over what the Council is trying to achieve over the long term.
- 26** The Council and its partners have a clear and shared vision for the Borough which is understood by councillors, staff and other stakeholders. The LSP's (the Gedling Partnership) second community strategy, 2006/08, sets out a vision for the Borough and agreed ambitions which guide the Council. This vision is: 'a community in which everyone plays their part in bringing about greater security, greater prosperity, improved health and a better environment for all. A borough where people want to live and do business'. The vision is underpinned by five priority themes: a safer community; a better local environment; tackling health inequalities; action for youth; and building social capital and pride in the local area. The Council effectively communicates this ambition through its summary versions of the community strategy and a range of other communication methods. Stakeholders are clear about Council ambitions and those for the Borough.
- 27** The Council has a clear vision but has not identified what the outcomes will be for local residents over the long term. The strategic corporate plan sets out the Council's vision which complements the ambitions of the LSP. The Council's vision is of a borough which is: 'healthy, green, safe and clean'. Its work to deliver this vision is translated into a number of priorities with three year targets. The strategic corporate plan identifies national, regional and sub-regional influences on the vision and Council direction. Local residents' views informed the vision and it therefore reflects the local context and key resident priorities. A new plan, published in March 2008, has adopted the same vision, but has revised priorities and included health. The strategic corporate plan is reviewed annually to ensure it reflects local needs and links to other regional and local strategies. There is a strong sense of direction for the Council to achieve a 'healthy, green, safe and clean' borough but what this will look like is less clear.

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

- 28** There are clear links between the community strategy, the LAA and the strategic corporate plan. The new LAA, 2008-2011, has outcomes which link to these and other strategies, both regional and local, such as the crime, disorder and drugs strategy. Ambitions are consistent with those of key partners such as Nottingham City Council and those of the Nottinghamshire LSP. The Council plays an active role in delivering LSP ambitions. It is the lead agency for a number of activities in the Gedling Partnership delivery plans, for example reducing the Greater Nottingham eco-footprint. Outcomes to be achieved are identified, although not all of these are challenging; for example, 20 per cent of new housing provision to be affordable. The Council is a committed member of the LSP and chairs it. Through the LSP the Council supports a network of theme and locally based partnerships serving the Borough, including a borough health and well-being partnership. The Council is the only district council in Nottinghamshire to lead a LAA theme. This framework helps ensure the Council and its partners are well placed to deliver the ambitions of communities.
- 29** Ambitions are based on a shared understanding amongst the Council and its partner organisations of local needs. The Council has developed community profiles which bring together demographic information at borough and ward level. Much of the information has been obtained from partner organisations including the police and County Council. This, plus information from consultation, fed into the development of the community strategy and strategic corporate plan. The profiles informed a draft 'State of the Borough' report which provides an overview of key facts relating to the Borough. A consultation programme around this, recently completed, will inform the new long-term vision and priorities of the sustainable community strategy and update the community profiles. This has included a programme of 25 road shows and presentations to stakeholders, promotion in the Council's resident's magazine and a questionnaire survey in hard copy and online formats. This approach ensures the ambitions represent key concerns and issues for the Borough and its residents.
- 30** The Council works well in partnership to deliver local priorities within the priorities for the sub-region. In the Council's first CPA partnerships were in the early stages of development and the Council was regarded as insular. Partnership working has developed significantly over the last three years. The Borough's position in the Greater Nottingham conurbation requires the Council to work closely with Nottingham City Council, the County Council and other partners on conurbation issues affecting its economic, environmental and social well-being. In strategic housing and spatial planning the Council is currently working with the City, County and other districts to align Core Strategies and deliver the significant growth required in the area. The Council is also part of an executive grouping of local authorities for the conurbation area, the Greater Nottingham Executive, to coordinate wider conurbation development. Effective working with the County Council has increased access to play and sports facilities. The Council recognises that some local issues are best delivered through partnership working which is helping it to deliver more than it can on its own.

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

- 31** The Council works effectively in partnership to champion the needs of the Borough and its community. For example to tackle homelessness, Elizabeth House, in Arnold, provides quick access accommodation for vulnerable single homeless people. The Council led on the development in partnership with Broxtowe and Rushcliffe Borough Councils, with the centre serving homeless people from all three Boroughs. Development of the site was controversial, with strong and vocal local opposition. The Council has worked with Framework, the centre operators and with the local community to calm any fears around drug use and anti-social behaviour. This has been successful with the group set up to oppose the development now having grown into a new residents' association. This range of effective partnership working is assisting the Council to deliver its ambitions.
- 32** Community leadership in specific localities is good. The Council has invested in capacity to support community leadership. Three cabinet advisors support portfolio holders on issues relating to parishes, neighbourhoods and regional matters. The Council is encouraging councillors to play a greater role within communities. As part of its service transformation programme the Council has created a resource to support ward councillors, for example in their work with area based initiatives (ABIs). Local ambitions are set out in ABI action plans developed through close working with LSP partners and communities. These reflect local issues and concerns and focus on LSP and Council priorities. The ABIs are chaired by councillors. This work has strengthened community capacity and engagement, with various community groups now taking a much more active involvement in leading action in their areas. This has resulted in improvements local residents recognise, such as reduction in recorded crime.

Prioritisation

- 33** The Council is performing adequately in this area. Priorities are based on a sound understanding of local needs and maintain an appropriate balance with national and regional agendas. But non-priorities at corporate level are not explicit. Action plans do not consistently use SMART targets and the cascade of priorities through some plans to implementation is not explicit, and the quality of targeting is inconsistent. Priorities and action plans do not systematically meet the needs of BME groups and other groups at risk of disadvantage. The Council targets resources where it can make a difference, for example on neighbourhood wardens.
- 34** The Council has clear priorities which relate directly to its LSP. Its corporate plan listed priorities for 2005/08 which were:
- improve community safety;
 - develop facilities, activities and a safe environment for children and young people; and
 - enhance the physical environment of the Borough.

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

35 In addition the Council has identified other key improvement areas:

- continued provision of good quality, well managed social rented housing;
- an increase in the proportion of waste recycled, coupled with an overall reduction in the amount of waste generated;
- local authority services that are more accessible and customer friendly; and
- residents who are well informed about the Council and its work and who participate in civic and community activity.

36 Priorities were revised late in 2007 to reflect the improvement priorities of the administration elected in May 2007 and to incorporate the national and LAA priority around health linking to local health issues around obesity, smoking and health inequalities:

- a high quality local environment;
- a safer community;
- good health for everyone; and
- a good start in life for children and young people.

37 However, non-priorities are not completely explicit at corporate level. The Council has instead identified areas of lesser priority at service level, for example, collection of green waste (which is charged for) and tourism provision in leisure. The Council has identified economic development as a non-priority corporately, but otherwise it is the responsibility of individual services to identify non-priorities and not agreed corporately. This means that there is a risk that resources may be spread too thinly.

38 Action plans support the delivery of priorities but do not consistently use SMART, outcome focused targets. Plans to devolve the running of community centres to local groups are not robust and action plans to support equality schemes do not include timescales for all actions, are not measurable and resources have not been allocated. The Council recognises this and has recently started the process of reviewing its targets starting with the outcomes for its new corporate plan. It is therefore difficult to see what the Council plans to achieve.

39 The cascade of priorities through some plans to implementation is not explicit. The Council's budget/service plan does not explicitly express aims by priority; instead they are listed by portfolios. Portfolio responsibilities do not mirror corporate priorities. At service level, these are interpreted via a vision and objectives document and project plans. Links to corporate priorities are not explicit. Therefore expressing the priorities in plans and implementation is incomplete.

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

- 40** Priorities and action plans do not systematically meet the needs of BME groups and other groups at risk of disadvantage. The Council does not routinely analyse feedback from these groups or share relevant data formally with partners. It has worked on building capacity in this area; with partners it has set up a cohesive communities' forum to have a fuller appreciation of local communities. In some services, the Council has worked well with the community; on offering Muslim burials for example. However, successful targeted services depend on initiatives at service level as the Council has not fully carried out or scrutinised equality impact assessments. Awareness of and action for migrant communities is also in the early stages. As a result the Council cannot be sure it is meeting diverse needs within the local community.
- 41** Priorities are based on the findings of needs assessments and community opinion. The Council undertakes an overall satisfaction survey annually and results feed into the corporate priority setting process, along with a review of existing priorities, political commitments, local/national priorities and the organisational vision. It also carries out consultation on its budget setting. This has led to decisions to support weekly waste collection in the summer and to cease funding police community support officers (PCSOs). The Council has completed a borough profile which sets out key demographic, socioeconomic and related measures at area level. As a result it has directed its work on ABIs to the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Action within these ABIs is directed by residents and interest groups. For example the Council funding of the new Brickyard community centre and playgroups in Honeywood Gardens was a result of working closely with the Honeywood Estate Action Team. Because of the Council's knowledge of the communities it serves it focuses resources and actions, making it more likely that the Council will make a difference to local people.
- 42** Staff, service users and other stakeholders understand key strategic priorities. A range of communication methods is used to communicate priorities. The Council communicates priorities to staff through chief executive briefings, its internal 'GEN' magazine, and team briefings. It makes residents aware of its priorities through public meetings and its resident's magazine, 'Contacts', and uses it as a mechanism to encourage service users to get involved in action planning around priorities. The Council listens to residents and there are examples of consulting with residents resulting in changes to services. For example, through 'Contacts' young people in Netherfield were invited to have their say on proposed leisure facilities. As a result the upgrade of the playground facilities at Jackie Bell's field in Netherfield was informed by the young people themselves. Consequently stakeholders know what the Council is aiming to deliver.
- 43** The Council balances local, regional and national priorities when setting its own priorities. For example, national priorities are reflected in housing and recycling targets and in wider partnership working. The Council has adopted national 'Every Child Matters' priority outcomes to progress its priority of 'a good start in life for children and young people'. Its priorities also reflect LAA priorities such as reducing crime and fear of crime, and reducing health inequalities; reflecting the objectives of its partners. This alignment ensures that the Council contributes to wider community issues.

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

- 44** The Council is integrating priorities into the delivery of services. Strategies and plans are in place which relate to the ambitions and priorities determined for the local area. The corporate plan is reviewed every year and lists the priorities with high level outcomes and targets. There is a shared understanding among partners of the duties, frameworks and priorities governing each other's work. Gedling Partnership leads action plans for children and young people and health and well being, while the South Nottinghamshire community safety strategy is informed by a strategic assessment and an action and delivery plan which focuses on the Borough. The Council's own strategies are at different stages of development, and some are very new, but there is a process for review that includes realignment to corporate objectives.
- 45** The Council targets resources effectively to meet priorities and the needs of local residents. It uses resources from lesser priorities and targets them towards priorities. For example, when the Council withdrew funding from PCSOs it redirected resources to its own neighbourhood warden initiative. The Council has become one of the top performers for dry recycling, despite not receiving any external funding. Budgetary decisions are based on feedback from consultation; for example the public signalled that they were in favour of stopping funding to PCSOs and that car park charging would be unacceptable. It has used information from its community profiles to target investment in specific areas. This has resulted in new facilities such as a youth gym. Asset management has supported priorities through ensuring leisure facilities are upgraded to meet the Council's youth and health agenda. The Council's financial strategy is aligned to priorities and it assesses revenue and capital development bids against its priorities. This ensures the Council maintains focus on its priorities and has the required resources to deliver.

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

Capacity

- 46** The Council is performing adequately in this area. Councillors do not provide sufficient challenge and support and their awareness of risk is limited. Developing the capacity of councillors and fully engaging them is in its infancy. The transformation programme is in its early stages and its impact on capacity is limited. The Council's strategic and systematic approach to equalities is not embedded. But, the Council is well led managerially, is financially sound and manages risks well. Overall decision making processes are effective. Some new building blocks for improvement are in place and partnership working is effective.
- 47** Councillors do not provide sufficient vision and challenge and support across the Council. The level of political input to the Council's strategic direction and operation is unclear. Portfolio responsibilities do not encourage senior councillors to look at performance against priorities and plans. The level of challenge to decisions through scrutiny is underdeveloped. But councillors and officers work well together and respect each other, working effectively within the ethical framework. Councillors comply with the code of conduct and this is reinforced by the independently chaired Standards Committee and the monitoring officer. The constitution clearly describes the role and remit of councillors and they do not become involved in minor operational matters.
- 48** Managerial leadership is good and effective. Roles of officers are well-defined and people are clear what they are responsible for. Senior managers, particularly the Chief Executive, take a clear lead on partnership working. Clear leadership and clear responsibilities ensure the Council is working effectively to support and deliver priorities.
- 49** Decision making processes within Cabinet are effective. The Council's constitution sets out a clear framework for decision making. Information is readily available and issues are regularly discussed by portfolio holders and senior managers. Decisions are quick and transparent and are openly reported on the Council's website. The Council made the difficult decision to agree its Local Plan, releasing green belt land to meet housing demands in the face of vociferous public opposition in some parts of the Borough. Decisions are made to help meet priorities.
- 50** Overview and scrutiny functions are developing, but are not yet robust. The current format of two committees has been in place since May 2007 and is still establishing

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

itself. Scrutiny is reactive rather than proactive and there is a lack of challenge and confidence by its councillors. Performance scrutiny meets four times a year, making timely action and follow-up difficult. If questions about performance are raised it may be three months before reports on action undertaken are received. This is recognised as an issue and interim meetings are held to raise questions with individual portfolio holders. But this is not a dynamic and interactive process with the committee having to submit questions in writing with a written response being given. Reviewing of performance is focused on performance indicators and projects but does not cover scrutinising of complaints, strategies and progress against action plans. Policy review has undertaken some useful reviews. However, these are not always linked to strategic priorities and the cabinet forward plan, making it difficult to see how they help decision making. Internal challenge is not currently effective in delivering robust policies and improved performance.

- 51** Capacity of councillors is underdeveloped. The Council recognises this and is taking action to provide training and development opportunities to build capacity. For example, it supports councillors in improving their ICT skills. An induction course for new councillors followed the May 2007 election and was well attended and feedback was positive. A project plan is in place to devise and implement a training and capacity building programme for councillors. Individual personal development plans were introduced from March 2008, although political support for these is unclear, reflected by the limited take-up of training by councillors. The portfolio holder with designated responsibility for councillor training has formed a cross political groups' sounding board, which has identified some issues for councillor development. The Council is building the capacity of its councillors.
- 52** The Council manages strategic risks well, but councillor awareness of risk is limited. Officers are clear about the main risks they manage. The Council has identified 11 strategic key risk areas which are reported, as a corporate risk scorecard, to the audit sub-committee on a quarterly cycle. Risk is recorded onto a risk database. This ensures the Council is both aware of risk and is working to minimise risk where possible. However, whilst it is clear to councillors that officers take action on risk, they are unclear of practices to manage and mitigate risks or their own role in risk management. For example, committee reports lack detailed information relating to the implications of risk and other decision impacts, such as equalities. Therefore councillors currently make decisions without full information regarding risk or possible contingencies.

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

- 53** The Council works effectively in partnership to enhance capacity and to deliver efficiency savings. A joint procurement agreement to commission a private sector stock condition survey with other local authorities within the Nottinghamshire conurbation secured a financial saving of £11,700. The Council has joined with other local districts to develop an ICT shared disaster recovery process and is looking to develop a shared building control service with other local councils. The Council has a sound procurement strategy that includes green procurement, e-procurement and encouraging local small businesses and voluntary organisations to do business with the Council. The Council shares a procurement officer with Rushcliffe Borough Council and supports the operational approach with a procurement toolkit. Joint working includes a combined Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) with two neighbouring councils. The Council is helping to develop capacity in the voluntary sector through providing access to its own management development programme. Effective partnership working with the police, County Council and local residents has delivered reductions in crime. Partnership working with LSP members is delivering improvements at area level through the ABIs, set up to address LSP priority themes. Joint working is helping to reduce costs and improve effectiveness.
- 54** Financial management is effective, financial standing is sound and the Council demonstrates a sustained commitment to value for money. It has a comprehensive efficiency plan and has met targets for achieving savings through a number of schemes including better procurement, increased usage and income and, by working in partnership. However, it is unclear what benefits are achieved through annual parish aid awards against corporate priorities. The Council has had some success in attracting external funding including funding for closed circuit television (CCTV) and Football Foundation funding for new changing facilities at Netherfield football club. Because of its effective approach to value for money and sound financial stewardship, the Council ensures it can sustain improvements over time.
- 55** The Council has a good approach to workforce planning and people management. It has good strategies for learning, development, recruitment and retained the 'Investors in People' (IIP) standard in 2007. It is developing managers through leadership courses and through mandatory coaching courses. Apprenticeships are available in leisure services and there has been a good level of take-up of management training and leadership courses run locally with colleges leading to 200 staff receiving qualifications. The Council enhances capacity through the use of consultants, for example to support its transformation programme. But, performance is below average for the overall proportion of staff with disabilities and staff from BME groups. The Council recognises this and has responded by working with community groups in advertising vacancies and working with Sure Start in hosting sessions for potential applicants to complete application forms. However, both the proportion of women and staff from BME groups in senior management is above average. Plans to introduce more flexible working practices are being rolled out, but are in their infancy. Members of staff are well supported and the Council is clear about the action it needs to take to ensure sufficient capacity for the future.

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

- 56** Staff capacity is impeded because of high sickness levels. The Council has not fully addressed sickness absence. Performance in 2006/07 was below average, reducing from a high of 11.56 days per employee in 2003/04 to 10.16 days in 2006/07. To help reduce sickness a range of incentives have been introduced to encourage staff to be in work; such as offering additional leave in exchange for good attendance. Improved sickness management and recording has been put in place. However, according to unaudited data the number of days of sickness per employee rose to 10.85 in 2007/08. There is a risk that sickness absence levels may impact on morale and put pressure on staff to provide additional cover.
- 57** Capacity is beginning to be developed through the service transformation programme but currently limited improvements have been delivered. The programme aims are to enable the Council to respond more quickly to customer enquiries; offer customers greater choice; resolve more customer enquiries at first point of contact; tailor services more towards local needs; and increase the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) to reduce bureaucracy, save money and speed up customer response times. Staff with business process re-engineering skills, along with external consultants, are rolling out the implementation of the programme. As a result improvements for customers have been achieved through the development of a 'one stop shop' delivering county and borough services. A new telephony system is providing improved access. Further improvements supported by better technology are planned with the call centre due to go live in October 2008. The programme will be completed by end of 2010. Once implemented there will be improved access to services for residents.
- 58** The Council is improving access to services through ICT investment. It has updated its ICT infrastructure. It has expanded self-service facilities via the website to include fault reporting, booking of leisure facilities and making payments and also invested in telephony. As a result customers are receiving an improved service.
- 59** The Authority has not embedded a strategic and integrated approach to equalities across the Council. The Council has self-assessed as achieving level 1 of the Equality Standard. Until recently, the Council had a key vacancy at a strategic level covering diversity and equality, so work has not been coordinated or progressed. The Council has recently agreed a way forward to achieve level 3 of the Equality Standard. Training on equalities for staff and councillors is in place and some equality impact assessments have been completed. The Council has partially implemented actions following its equality impact assessments. Consequently it has not systematically differentiated services where required in order to meet diverse needs in the community.

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

Performance management

- 60** The Council is performing adequately in this area. It has a clear performance management framework and performance monitoring is integrated with financial management. It has a good system for performance management with its local strategic partners and uses external learning well. However, the role of scrutiny in challenging performance is not fully developed and target setting lacks rigour. It is difficult to see how the framework is used to track progress against corporate priorities. Performance management is not delivering good levels of improvement against best value performance indicators.
- 61** The Council has a clear performance management framework and carries out systematic corporate performance management. The full range of national and local indicators is reported to senior management team (SMT) on a quarterly basis and follow up action is taken where necessary. As a result performance has improved in weaker aspects of service such as re-let times of local authority housing (excluding difficult to let properties) and in housing benefits. Cabinet discusses performance quarterly based on a comprehensive performance digest, which is also reviewed at quarterly scrutiny meetings. The digest covers all key indicators by portfolio and has a traffic light system. Detailed annual performance is reported to full Council in an annual report. Portfolio holders discuss performance with individual service heads. Departments monitor performance on a monthly basis and service objectives are reflected in personal performance and development reviews. Consequently there is a system for identifying under performance.
- 62** Performance management is integrated with resource management and this is well applied. Section level improvement tasks and budget information are reviewed monthly within departments. SMT and cabinet review the quarterly performance digest which draws together budget and performance progress. As a result SMT and cabinet consider amending targets or budgets including any necessary virements. These digests are circulated to all councillors and are also considered by performance review scrutiny committee, ensuring that councillors and senior management can assess performance alongside financial investment.
- 63** The Council regularly reviews performance with its partners. The LSP performance management framework includes a partnership website and sets out high level outcomes for partnership priorities with indicators and targets. The Council facilitates this performance monitoring system and coordinates six monthly strategic performance assessments of Gedling Partnership's delivery plans. Performance is reported on a traffic light basis; an annual report is produced and reported to the Partnership Board. This ensures transparency and a mutual understanding of performance issues. The Council is clear on how effectively partnerships are performing and with partners is driving performance.

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

- 64** The Council and its partners use learning from a variety of sources to improve service performance. The Council uses external challenge and review, for example through peer reviews such as the LSP peer challenge and through the Home Office CDRP review. Leisure services are self assessing against the new culture and sport improvement tool, developed by Sport England and the IDeA. The Council benchmarks its services through networks such as the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and this informs service issues such as changing opening hours in leisure centres and allocating more resources to benefits work. At management level there are opportunities for sharing and learning within the Council through cross cutting groups such as the customer focus working group and presentations on best practice to SMT, for example, the experience of CCTV or UK quality scheme for sport and leisure (QUEST) implementation. The Council is well placed to push forward future developments successfully based on its approach to learning.
- 65** The Council uses knowledge from complaints and customer feedback to drive improvement within services, but lacks a corporate approach. It has a user friendly and well publicised complaints system with guidance for staff and service users. Satisfaction with complaints handling has risen and complaints to the Ombudsman fell by 33 per cent in 2007/08 (according to unaudited figures) compared with 2006/07. The Council learns from customer complaints at service level but does not analyse them formally. Important learning can result, for example some customers of the bulky waste service explained that they were physically unable to put large items of furniture in the front garden, as a result the waste service put in place indemnity form arrangements so that operators could collect furniture from inside the houses of older or disabled people. However, this learning is not gathered or shared corporately by officers or councillors through a systematic process, so the benefit to the Council is not maximised.
- 66** The level of challenge in performance management is not consistent. For example, the role of scrutiny in performance management is not fully developed and performance is not being challenged in a timely way. The performance digest, although comprehensive, is not presented to management and councillors in an accessible graphical or pictorial format. Within it there is no comparison with the top performers elsewhere. The performance digest presents indicators by portfolios, which are not linked to priorities, making it difficult to see how the Council is performing against its priorities. It is difficult to assess progress against Council priorities. The Council is planning changes to the digest following feedback from councillors. Councillors have no role in corporate complaint analysis and ward level analysis of complaints which limits their knowledge of how well the Council serves the local community. Therefore the Council is not fully utilising its own councillors to challenge existing performance levels, champion the best performance or to promote learning from patterns in customer feedback.

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

- 67** The quality of the Council's targets is variable. For example, the Council is not able to measure its achievements against a number of targets in the corporate plan 2005/08 because baselines were not available. Some targets are not SMART so that it is difficult for the Council to know when it has achieved them. For example, increase the rate of participation by young people does not identify a measurable target. Other targets are challenging, such as those related to crime reduction. The Council recognises this and is planning a review of its measures to coincide with implementing its new computerised performance monitoring system, the new national performance indicators and a revision of its local measures to include the new national framework.

What has been achieved?

Achievement and Improvement

- 68** The Council is performing well in this area. The Council has delivered against many of its priorities. Many of these achievements have been delivered through good partnership working, such as achieving community safety targets. Resident satisfaction is good and improving. Performance in services key to those at most risk of disadvantage, for example housing benefits, has been performing below average but improvements have been seen in the last year. But the rate of improvement against best value performance indicators (PIs) is below average.
- 69** Resident satisfaction is good and improving. Surveys undertaken in 2006/07 showed that satisfaction levels in key survey areas were comparably high, with performance in the top 25 per cent of councils for sports and leisure facilities, planning service and the Council overall, and above average for recycling, waste collection, cleanliness, parks and open spaces and with complaints handling. However satisfaction levels are below average for tenant satisfaction, both for the overall service and with opportunities for participation.
- 70** Housing benefit performance is improving but not consistent. The average time to process new benefit claims and changes of circumstances are above average. Housing benefits claims processed correctly and benefits overpayments recovered as a percentage of all overpayments are below average. In 2007/08 all unaudited indicators have improved. The Council is ensuring an improved service to those most at need.
- 71** Rate of improvement in best value performance indicators is below average. Between 2004/05 and 2006/07, 47 per cent of performance indicators improved against an average of 54 to 56 per cent for similar councils. In 2006/07, 52 per cent of performance indicators improved over the previous year against an average of 56.9 to 59.1 per cent for similar councils. In 2006/07, 31 per cent of indicators were in the best performing 25 per cent, compared to the national average for district councils of 33 per cent.
- 72** Achievements delivered against the former three corporate priorities are set out overleaf.

Improve Community Safety

- 73** Ambitious crime reduction targets set for the Borough have been achieved. The Council, with its partners, has exceeded its target to reduce crime by 22.5 per cent over a three year period, securing a 29.3 per cent reduction. In the past year there has been a 20.6 per cent reduction, the equivalent of 2,257 offences. Taken together, vehicle crime and domestic burglary incidences have fallen by 48 per cent in the last four years. The Council funds seven neighbourhood wardens who work closely with the police and take part in joint tasking meetings with PCSOs. In Netherfield, following investment in a CCTV system and undertaking clean-ups, public reassurance is increasing. The Council has introduced shop and pub watch schemes in its main shopping centres, backed with a radio scheme. This work is contributing to falling crime rates; recorded anti-social behaviour fell by 11.5 per cent in 2007/08, according to police unaudited data, compared with 2006/07. This strong partnership working ensures effective action to reduce crime.
- 74** The Council contributes to improved community safety within the Borough through targeted activities. For example the Council provides football training for young people working in partnership with the police. Within one ABI the Council is working with a social enterprise company to take young people to leisure facilities and to provide activities for them. As a result the ABI group has reported a reduction in graffiti and vandalism in the area. Targeted activities are improving community safety and reducing anti-social behaviour in some areas.
- 75** An effective approach is made to environmental crime. The Council made early use of powers to issue fixed penalty notices, with 347 being issued since 2003; 90 per cent of these have been paid. This work has been recognised by DEFRA as best practice. The Council takes a strong approach to environmental crime.
- 76** The Council and its partners have had less success in addressing their fear of crime target. 56 per cent of residents responding to the 2007 Tracker survey thought that crime had got worse over the past year. Survey results show that more residents feel safer in their local areas by day and by night in 2007 than they did in 2005 but figures are below targets set. Despite the good reduction in crime overall, residents are still fearful of crime.

What has been achieved?

Develop facilities, activities and a safe environment for children and young people

- 77** Additional facilities for children and young people have been delivered. These include six new play areas, three of which are shared with schools; seven new ball courts, three of which are also shared with schools; two new skate parks and a climbing boulder facility, plus three refurbished play areas. The Council built a dedicated gym facility for young people, marketed as the SHOKK youth gym at Carlton Forum leisure centre, which is a dual use facility with Wheldon school. This was achieved in partnership with the school and the PCT School Sports Partnership. There were over 12,000 attendances at the gym in 2007/08, up by 33 per cent compared with the previous year. Young people are involved in the design and development of these facilities, for example currently engaging with teenagers and primary school children using video techniques to develop facilities at Netherfield. Children and young people have increased access to facilities, helping to improve their health and keeping them away from risk taking activity.
- 78** The Council is delivering health improvements through a range of activities for children and young people. The young people's positive moves exercise referral programme, developed in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Teaching Primary Care Trust (PCT), is a tailor made programme for 8 to 16 year olds who have a condition that can be helped through increased physical activity. The scheme is in its fifth term and 126 young people have benefited from the scheme. It involves a 24-week programme of activities including football, gymnastics, dance, and swim-fit, as well as sessions in the Shokk youth gym. The programme has led to more young people not only increasing their physical activity, but enjoying exercise. Young people are being supported to improve their health.
- 79** Participation by young people in physical activity is increasing. Over 7,000 young people hold a Gedling leisure card offering them reduced price access to the Council's leisure facilities. The Council has reduced prices for young people, increasing usage. This includes 50 pence activities for young people in the summer. Free swims contributed to almost 3,700 extra junior swims in summer 2007 compared with summer 2006. Opening hours and programming at Carlton Forum has increased the number of junior sessions and clubs. Activity levels are increasing.

Enhance the physical environment of the Borough

- 80** Investment in cleanliness has led to good and improving performance. Levels of unacceptable littering have fallen from 23 per cent in 2003/04 to 5 per cent in 2007/08 with performance amongst the top 25 per cent of councils. This has been achieved through targeted initiatives such as 'flying skips' used to discourage fly-tipping and a free graffiti removal service. This activity ensures that the Borough is clean.

What has been achieved?

- 81** The Council has improved the Borough's environment through investment in Arnot Hill Park. Over £1 million of lottery money was invested between 1999 and 2006 in the Borough's main park. This enabled significant restoration of the park, including new landscaping, draining and remodelling of the lake, new lighting and improved access. The park is used for a range of community events and it has secured Green Flag status. Two park rangers have also been appointed, whose roles cover education, publicity, security and sustainability. Improvements are being made which local residents recognise.
- 82** The Council is improving its internal work on environmental sustainability. The Council has introduced bike racks and shower blocks for cyclists; travel plans and has one 'car free' day a year. Council bikes can be provided. Within Direct Services, gutter water is used to wash vehicles. The energy efficiency of leisure centres is due to be assessed later in 2008. The Council also raises awareness through things like reviewing how many PCs are left on at 3 am in morning. Work on sustainable development outside the Council is relatively new, although a senior manager is programme manager for environmental sustainability in the LAA. Baseline information on carbon emissions is currently being collected to enable the Council to monitor reductions per capita and within the Council. Environmental improvements and opportunities are being provided internally.
- 83** The Council works effectively in partnership to improve the quality of life for residents. Killisick Estate had a spring clean makeover as part of a week of action in February 2008 organised by Gedling Community Safety Partnership. This included a number of initiatives such as free home safety checks and crime prevention advice to help people protect themselves in their homes. There were high visibility police patrols and additional neighbourhood warden patrols. Environmental clean-ups to tackle 'grot spots', litter picks and graffiti removal were the main focus of the week, while enforcement action tackled offences such as truancy, fly-tipping, and littering. As a result local the environment is improving through targeted action.
- 84** Planning service performance is above average. Currently the Council performs in the top 25 per cent of councils for dealing with major and other applications and is above average for minor applications.

Other priority issues

- 85** Combined recycling and composting rates has consistently improved over the last three years and performance is above average The Council has a strong focus on dry recycling and is performing well. It delivers kerbside recycling in 99.4 per cent of the district, collecting glass, paper, cardboard and plastics. This has resulted in high dry recycling rates. However, in line with priorities, a free garden waste service is not offered, with all households offered collection of garden waste for a fee. The Council strongly encourage home composting. Overall the Council is delivering above average performance for combined recycling and composting.

What has been achieved?

- 86** Waste collected per household is low. Although the Council collects residual waste weekly during the summer months it has achieved above average performance for the total amount of waste collected per head. This has remained below 400kg for the last three years and has been achieved through encouraging waste minimisation by education and enforcement. The Council has strictly enforced practices to reject overfilled and heavy bins. Effective reduction in waste going to landfill is being achieved.
- 87** Services are more accessible and customer friendly. The One-Stop-Shop facility at the Civic Centre has opened, enabling members of the public to access information from one point (with a contact point for Nottinghamshire County Council). There has been significant expansion in services available online and a big increase in the percentage of Council buildings accessible to people with disabilities from 42.5 per cent in 2003/04 to 96 per cent in 2007/08 (unaudited). A range of investment is improving access for residents.
- 88** Performance on social housing is adequate. The Council has met its target on decent homes. At 31 March 2008 the Council had 8 per cent of its homes non-decent. Performance on the percentage of urgent repairs is amongst the top 25 per cent of councils and completion of non-urgent repairs is above average. Satisfaction levels are below average for tenant satisfaction, both for the overall service and with opportunities for participation. Transfer to Gedling Homes will bring in £14.9 million private sector and government investment over the next five years which will be used to deliver improvements wanted by tenants.
- 89** The Council is gearing up to deliver its new priorities. Outcomes for each priority have been identified and targets have been set and are awaiting approval. Plans to deliver new priorities are in the process of being revised.

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 Gedling Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 14 July to 18 July 2008.
- 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.

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