

Progress Assessment Report

March 2006



Progress Assessment

Mansfield District Council

Audit 2005-2006

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Contents

Progress assessments	4
Introduction	5
Summary	6
Recommendations	7
Context	8
The locality	8
The Council	8
What is the Council trying to achieve?	9
How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?	10
What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?	12
In the light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	14
Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003	16
Appendix 2 – Progress monitoring against the findings of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment	24

Progress assessments

In 2002, Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was introduced at single tier and county councils (ST&CCs) and at district councils in 2003/04, as a way of supporting councils to deliver improvements in services to local people. CPA brought together existing information on service performance in councils with a corporate assessment of each council's ability to improve. This was used to reach an overall conclusion about whether a council was 'excellent', 'good', 'fair', 'weak' or 'poor'.

Councils have prepared improvement plans following CPA and those councils classified as 'under-performing' have received annual progress assessments by the Audit Commission. Those cases giving most cause for concern have also been the subject of formal engagement by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). Through its network of relationship managers, the Commission worked closely with lead officials assigned by the ODPM in developing an appropriate monitoring programme.

Audit Commission progress assessment work has sought to measure the impact and sustainability of improvement activity. The progress assessment work has been tailored to local circumstances to provide appropriate public assurance and to contribute to improvement reporting. It involved an evidence-based judgement on progress against the original corporate assessment criteria, but without producing a score.

The progress assessment is part of the Commission's commitment to helping councils ensure continuous improvement to services for local people. It does this in the context of its strategic regulation principles, which look to minimise the burden of regulation at the same time as maximising its impact. We are committed to working in partnership with other regulators and the ODPM in this aim.

Introduction

- 1 In November 2003 the Audit Commission published a CPA category for Mansfield District Council. This assessment categorised the Council as 'weak'. The key strengths and weaknesses from the corporate assessment are set out in Appendix 1.
- 2 This report presents an analysis of the Council's progress to date based on the Council's implementation of its improvement and recovery plan and comparison with the baseline position of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and the previous progress assessment report. This assessment was published in January 2005 and concluded that the Council had achieved inconsistent progress on its improvement priorities.

Summary

- 3 Mansfield District Council is progressing well. It has made progress in addressing its corporate weaknesses and the quality of its services is now around the average for district councils, according to the latest published performance information (for 2004/05). This is an improvement on the previous year.
- 4 The Council's new corporate plan gives clear ambitions for the Council and the five priorities provide a focus for its work. The corporate plan was developed following recommendations in the last progress assessment and reflects extensive engagement with the local community and partners. The plan is supported by internal plans and processes which will contribute to its delivery.
- 5 The Council's investment in building corporate capacity has been successful in improving the effectiveness of the organisation. Key building blocks such as performance management, risk management, project management, and the medium term financial strategy are becoming embedded across the organisation. Whilst the performance management system is still evolving, it is starting to focus on outcomes and its importance is understood throughout the organisation. However, procurement is still underdeveloped and there are no set procedures to guide the Council's procurement activity. The Council does not use procurement effectively.
- 6 Effective internal leadership is increasing the capacity of the organisation and improving communication. The appointment of a managing director during the year to manage the organisation and work alongside the elected mayor has given a renewed focus. The planned major restructurings will address both the poor use of management capacity and the difficulties in recruitment in some specialist areas, although it is too early to judge their effectiveness in increasing capacity.
- 7 Service delivery is improving but from a low base and performance is still only around average when compared with other councils. The Council's performance has improved in 48 per cent of national indicators and 51 per cent of these indicators were above the median when compared with other councils. There is noticeable improvement in some priority areas such as recycling where the recycling rate has doubled and street cleaning where fewer streets are littered. Despite these improvements, performance overall is mixed and is still poor in key areas such as housing and cleanliness of streets.
- 8 The Council uses external and internal challenge to focus on areas for improvement. It is open to external challenge, using the recent peer review to refresh its improvement plan. It has developed a new internal process of efficiency reviews, providing a quick challenge to services to identify improvements and efficiencies.

Recommendations

- 9 It is recommended that the Council:
- actively and promptly shares the findings of this progress assessment with staff;
 - takes it to an appropriate public committee meeting; and
 - uses the key findings as the basis for revising the improvement plan in conjunction with any direction from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Context

The locality

- 10 The district of Mansfield has changed considerably over the past 20 years and it is finally overcoming the loss of the mining and textile industries. The decline of these industries in the 1980s left a legacy of social economic and environmental problems. The Council engaged on a long programme of regeneration which has increased prosperity in the district. But, although the deprivation level has improved from 29th to 33rd (out of 234) on the national index of deprivation, deprivation is still relatively high. The area has a low skill base with low educational attainment and the average gross weekly pay of workers in the district is £258, well below the regional average of £334.

The Council

- 11 Mansfield District Council is one of few district councils with an elected mayor. The Council faced considerable change following the election of the Mayor in 2002 and the whole Council election in 2003 which resulted in a significant number of new councillors. The Member structure has evolved over the past two years - the Mayor now has a Cabinet of himself, five Independent portfolio holders and a Liberal Democrat deputy mayor all with some delegated powers.
- 12 The management structure is changing. The chief executive and deputy chief executive have left and a managing director has been appointed to manage the Council's organisational structure. There are currently nine heads of service but the structure is under review and it is likely to change in the near future.

What is the Council trying to achieve?

- 13 The Council has made progress. It has refocused its ambitions and priorities and is addressing the key issues of concern for the district.
- 14 The Council is clear about what it wants to achieve for Mansfield. It recognises the need to have a few clear and focused priorities that reflect the needs of local residents. The Council has adopted a new corporate plan 2005 to 2015 and this has five corporate priorities:
 - reducing crime and disorder;
 - ensure decent homes for all;
 - revitalise our district town centres and neighbourhoods;
 - develop a high quality clean and pleasant environment; and
 - ensure effective leadership and management.
- 15 The Council actively engaged with local people and stakeholders in developing its new ambition and priorities. It consulted with residents, businesses, partners, and staff using that early consultation to identify the priorities for the area and to develop a draft corporate plan, which it then consulted on. The final version of the corporate plan took account of the responses to this second consultation. The plan, which was approved by Council in October 2005, contains a detailed and ambitious set of priorities for the area reflecting the views of local people.
- 16 The Council understands the scale of the problems that the area is facing. It recognises that, although there has been some success in economic development, the area still has low skill base and shorter life expectancy when compared with national averages. Leadership on diversity issues is being addressed with a Councillor champion and cross-service diversity group. The Council has identified key issues of deprivation, fear of crime, and dirty streets and these are reflected in its ambitions and priorities.
- 17 Senior managers and staff have a clear understanding of the Council's priorities for the area. They are also clear about how the priorities are being used to focus the work of the Council and are enthusiastic about achieving them. The Council's priorities have realistic but challenging targets together with the desired outcomes. The priorities and targets reflect national and regional priorities.
- 18 The Council has started to link resource allocation with its priorities. It has changed its budget process to focus on the corporate plan priorities. The medium-term financial strategy identifies the required funding for priority areas. Its efficiency reviews were targeted at non-priority areas and will deliver efficiency and cash savings. These efficiency savings have raised the profile of the need to target resources at priorities and are being directed to priority areas.

How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?

- 19 The Council has made some progress in improving both its capacity and its performance management.
- 20 The Council is self-aware about its capacity and is taking action to use it more effectively to deliver its corporate plan. The Council recognises that it makes poor use of its senior management capacity with a large management team which lacks strategic focus. It is addressing this with changes to the organisational structure. Current difficulties with the recruitment of some specialists such as environmental health officers are being addressed through the use of area teams for regulatory services. The Council is improving the capacity of the organisation by, for example, greater delegation on HR issues to give senior managers control over their service; and by managing the previously high levels of sickness absence through a new process and a focus on staff wellbeing, which is now showing benefit.
- 21 There is active visible and effective leadership in the organisation. The appointment of the managing director has given a renewed focus to the operation of the organisation. For example, Cabinet and management team meetings are more focused, receiving fewer reports as there are no longer any reports for information, just reports where decisions or actions are needed. Internal delegation has increased with the managing director having the delegated authority to manage and this has improved the responsiveness of the organisation.
- 22 Councillor and officer roles are not yet clear but are developing. The Member, Officer Code of Conduct is not clear. It does not provide adequate guidance on what councillors should do how they should behave, and how they should interact with service delivery. This is being addressed with new protocols which should ensure that councillors are provided with the information they need without disrupting the work of the sections. The changing culture is resulting in better relationships between councillors and officers.
- 23 Decision-making processes are slow and sap capacity. Member delegation levels have increased, for example portfolio holders have some delegated powers although all decisions have to be signed off by the Mayor. But some actions still have to go to several committees before a decision is made. For example, the approval to go to consultation over planning guidance needed to be considered by the Local Development Framework Group, Planning Committee, Cabinet, and Council before the decision was made.
- 24 The Council has the financial capacity to deliver its priorities. The Council's medium-term financial strategy shows how proposed revenue and capital expenditure is to be financed. The Council has a track record of acquiring external funding but now only seeks funding for actions which contribute to its priorities.

- 25 The Council's approach to procurement is not robust. It has produced a procurement strategy which outlines options but it does not provide a process or checklist to guide managers when carrying out procurement activity. The strategy has not identified a baseline for procurement expenditure or identified actions to ensure economic procurement of goods. Managers do not use the strategy to guide procurement activity. For example, printer cartridges are bought individually from local shops; procurement of some specialist professional services is not seen as procurement activity and simply uses lists of specialists even though contracts are of significant scale. The Council is not able to use its purchasing power effectively for the benefit of the council tax payer.
- 26 The Council has been innovative with partnership working. It has extended its capacity to deliver decent homes by working with a strategic partner in a partnered contract which external consultants helped to set up and will continue to manage. It has developed effective working relationships with other public sector bodies to ensure that efforts are not duplicated. For example, it is working with the police force to set up protocols and methods of working for those areas, such as crime prevention, where both parties have a significant role to play. This has increased the Council's capacity to deliver improvements in services.
- 27 The Council's performance management framework is sound and becoming embedded in the organisation. The performance management framework cascades the corporate priorities and actions down to service and individual level throughout the organisation. Staff are clear about what is expected of them. This has improved performance by, for example, highlighting high levels of sickness absence, which led to a task group being set up to identify ways to successfully reduce sickness levels.
- 28 Performance monitoring is starting to focus on priorities and outcomes and enables senior managers and councillors to understand variations in performance. Budget information is reported regularly to a monitoring group and variances have to be explained and remedial action taken. The Council has identified the 20 performance indicators that were giving most concern as its key performance indicators to focus on this year. Performance information on these and other indicators is reported in an easy to understand format to senior managers and councillors to ensure that standards are being met.

What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?

- 29 The Council's overall performance has improved. But, based on national performance indicators, performance is still only around average. It is investing in appropriate building blocks to improve service delivery.
- 30 Key performance indicators (KPI) show improvement. For 2004/05, 50 per cent of key performance indicators (KPI) were above the median for all districts - in the previous year 40 per cent of KPIs were above the median. There were fewer KPIs where the Council's performance was amongst the worst of all district councils in 2004/05 - 25 per cent compared with 34 per cent in 2003/04. In 2004/05, 48 per cent of all KPIs improved as compared with 35 per cent in the previous year.
- 31 When compared with other councils, the Council's performance for last year (2004/05) is spread evenly across the quartiles with 25 per cent in each. It is high spending in most of its services, but performance and satisfaction levels are not high.
- 32 The Council is meeting its targets for most of its indicators but there is some way to go before it delivers to a high standard across all services. The Council performs well against its own targets - its performance monitoring data shows that, in the third quarter of the current year, it is on track to meet 62 of its own targets this year, but is not on track to meet a further 19 targets.
- 33 The Council has invested to address existing capacity gaps and drive future improvement. It is progressing with the key building blocks of performance management, risk management and project management all of which managers are starting to use routinely. The project management software provides better management information and helps ensure that projects are aligned with priorities. The Council has invested in technology to improve its poorly performing services, for example investing in hand-held computers for the town centre team to improve speed of reaction to problems and for housing maintenance teams to improve the management of appointments.

Reducing crime and disorder

- 34 By working closely with partners, the Council is reducing crime and disorder. Joint working with the police and DAAT (drug and alcohol awareness team) resulted in a 25 per cent reduction in antisocial behaviour incidents in Mansfield town centre in summer 2005 according to the Council's figures. Other initiatives have resulted in a reported 65 per cent reduction in crime in neighbourhood renewal areas following installation of burglar alarms.

Ensure decent homes for all

- 35 The Council's housing performance is poor. The Council has reacted to the poor result from the housing repairs inspection with an improvement plan to address issues raised. Monitoring data shows some improvement to the service with average time to relet reducing from 98 days (2004/05) to 71 days (third quarter 2005/06), although performance is still poor. There is a high proportion (27 per cent) of council homes that do not meet the decent homes standards although the partnered contract referred to above seeks to tackle this issue. A forthcoming Audit Commission housing inspection will review progress in more detail.

Revitalise our district town centres and neighbourhoods

- 36 The Council is improving the quality of life in neighbourhoods. It has improved its service to some disadvantaged groups by improving its benefits service which is now rated as significantly improved by the Department of Work and Pensions. It has been successful in regenerating disused industrial and commercial sites. The programme of town centre improvements is starting to have an impact on improving the environment with cleaner streets and a reduction in town centre crime. This work is supported by the planning service which is performing well in meeting its targets for speed of determining planning applications and achieving a high level of delegation at 94 per cent.

Develop a high quality clean and pleasant environment

- 37 Performance against this priority is mixed. Satisfaction levels for waste, recycling, and cleanliness are low when compared with other councils. The Council has secured external resources from neighbourhood renewal funding to invest in street cleaning. It has been successful at reducing the proportion of land that is littered from 58 per cent in 2003/04 to 25 per cent in 2004/05, although it is still in the worst quartile. The Council secured external funding to finance the roll-out of the recycling service and this has resulted in improved performance from 8 per cent in 2003/04 to 16 per cent in 2004/05, but this performance is still amongst the worst of all district councils.

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

- 38 The Council has made good progress in improving its self-awareness of what needs to be done and in developing its potential to learn. It has put in place long-term plans and processes to help it deliver.
- 39 The Council is self-aware and has a realistic understanding of what it has achieved and what remains to be done. The Council has been successful in implementing many aspects of its original improvement plan, for example it has adopted a corporate plan, and a medium-term financial strategy. It has learnt from those areas that were not successful, for example it is continuing to develop its approach to service planning.
- 40 The Council has robust plans in place which clearly relate to the ambitions of the locality. It reacted to the recommendations in the first progress assessment by developing a longer-term corporate plan to drive the work of the Council. The priorities and targets in this plan address those areas where the Council has not performed well previously as well as other issues of local concern.
- 41 The Council has put in place a range of internal plans and processes to support the delivery of the corporate plan. It uses a prioritisation model to decide its capital programme. This is based on the link with corporate priorities, government initiatives, financial considerations, statutory obligations and an assessment of risk. It uses its medium-term financial strategy to guide investment decisions. By setting out future resourcing, the financial strategy makes forward planning easier for services, and should ensure that developments to services are linked to delivering priorities.
- 42 The Council has not fully assessed what capacity it needs to implement its corporate plan. The medium-term financial strategy effectively identifies financial resourcing but the Council has not yet completed an analysis of its staffing requirements. It acknowledges that there is further work to be done on workforce planning and developing management competencies. It has included these actions in its plan to roll-out the new organisational structure, which is aimed at delivering the Council's corporate plan.
- 43 The Council is open to both external and internal challenge. The Council encourages external input through, for example, the SOLACE peer review and incorporated the key weaknesses identified into its improvement plan. It engaged consultants to identify appropriate structures and delegation, and to clarify roles for councillors to ensure efficient working between councillors and officers. It has addressed the key issues raised in the original CPA inspection and those raised in the first progress assessment. Internally, it uses efficiency reviews and best value reviews as challenge mechanisms for continuous improvement. The Council's openness to challenge provides a foundation to enable it to improve services.

- 44** The Council seeks out learning from others and uses this to drive improvements. For example, it accessed the IDeA's experience and learning to develop councillors and to build their capacity. It also used the IDeA's expertise to resolve difficulties in planning which were affecting performance, but which have now been resolved. It has a record of learning from other councils, for example its new approach to managing sickness absence was informed by visits to Corby Borough Council.
- 45** There is an improved culture of openness and transparency. The managing director has opened up internal information. For example, management team minutes are circulated to ensure that all officers are aware of the wider issues affecting the Council. The managing director sends a weekly diary email to all employees and councillors which covers the key events of her week. These actions have been well received throughout the organisation and ensure that employees and councillors are aware of current events and feel more involved in the work of the Council.

Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003

Table 1

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong track record of community leadership in economic development and housing regeneration. • Examples of engagement of residents in service developments and through NMTs in five small areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three priorities are broad and do not provide a clear picture of what the council aims to achieve in the area in the medium or longer-term. • Not clear if ambitions are realistic or robust. • Approach to community engagement in key forums is generally paternalistic and lack of involvement of residents in strategy or policy development. • Lack of leadership and drive to the community on diversity and equality actions. • Poor leadership internally in tackling poor service performance.

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Focus	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong track record of sustained focus in some difficult areas such as economic and housing regeneration. • Focus supported by clear structures and roles and by effective use of project management in some areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loses focus on some developments such as planned actions in street cleaning and benefits.
Prioritisation	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good understanding of issues affecting local community and consultation has informed setting of priorities. • Priorities encompass national priorities although slow in translating some into service improvement imperatives. • General awareness of council's broad priorities amongst staff and partners, with leadership strongest in regeneration. • Some examples of shifting of resources and disinvestment in some areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three priorities do not provide clear direction and services 'fit' their priorities to the corporate objectives. • Resources not aligned to priorities and non-priorities are unclear. • Basis for decision-making for investment is unclear. • No clear strategic approach to communication and consultation with the community.

18 Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Capacity	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good relationships between officers and councillors with generally committed and knowledgeable staff and senior councillors working hard to become familiar with their portfolios. • Meetings are well conducted and reports clear. • Financial standing rated as adequate and Capital and Asset Management plans as good. • Strong record of leverage of external funds. • Strong record of effective partnership working in complex service areas. • Use of the private sector to top-up Council services and to bring new areas of skill and expertise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of experience amongst councillors with change of administration. • Select Commissions need development. • Tight financial position with a predicted shortfall of £800,000 in each of the next four years. • Some staffing issues including length of time for vacancies in some areas and fluctuating sickness absence rate. HR policies not always leading to effective HR management. • Lack of corporate procurement strategy and policy bias towards keeping services historically provided by the Council in-house.

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Performance management	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound performance management framework linking strategic objectives to departmental and service plans and database to monitor improvements. • CEMT and portfolio holders receive regular performance reports. • Some examples of action to identify poor performance, eg voids and recycling. • Has made a start in applying the principles and practice of risk management but it is not embedded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of effective leadership in using performance management as a basis for decisions and to drive up performance. • No regular reporting to Select Commissions or Cabinet. • Some elements of the performance management framework are not applied consistently. • Cross-cutting performance is not monitored effectively. • Stronger focus on inputs rather than the service improvement to be achieved. • Has not assured value for money (VFM) through market testing in some key areas and costs indicators vary from very good to poor. • Limited service standards and learning from complaints.

20 Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement in quality of service	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic development activity is proactive and achieving good developments. • Strengths in housing include all non-traditional dwellings brought up to DCH, and good quality homeless accommodation. Tenancy Management judged as two stars. • Two stars revenues and benefits service and charter mark. • Two-star cultural services and charter mark for Water Meadows. • Planning practice is promoting and achieving some good quality developments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low satisfaction rate at 59 per cent. • Fifty-four per cent of PIs in the third and fourth quartiles (2001/02). • Mixed picture on use of resources PIs. • Reported levels of crime are high, but with some reductions in the last year. • Housing repairs service indicators are poor and there is low tenant satisfaction. • One-star refuse service with poor recycling and high volume of waste collected. • High levels of litter on streets. • Low public satisfaction with parks at 57 per cent.

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement of improvement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 54 per cent PIs improved from 2000/01 to 2001/02. • Sustained good quality of economic development service – previously very high unemployment rates have reduced to just above the regional average. • 60 per cent reduction in car crime in council car parks and reduction in fear of crime in town centre. • User experiences improving – eg visible town centre improvements, theatre, choice based lettings service and new services through Supporting People. • Speed of processing of planning applications and checklist score improving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited evidence of sustained improvement trend in ‘use of resources’ PIs. • Some housing PIs show improvement but others have deteriorated and performance in repairs is still poor. • Improvement actions in benefits have not progressed and prospects of improvement judged to be poor. • Recycling rate deteriorated from 8 per cent to 4.62 per cent (2001/02) and 4.57 per cent (2002/03) and volume of waste is increasing 3 per cent per year. • Limited evidence of any improvement in street cleanliness.

22 Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Investment	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has successfully implemented modernised political structures. • Good induction and training for new members. • Partnership work leading to investment in cross-cutting areas. • Progress in using BVRs effectively. • Has developed and implemented a performance management framework. • Developed basic risk management framework. • Investment in ICT developments. • Twin bin recycling being rolled out. • Has restructured and created corporate capacity and better integration of some service areas. • Has sought external challenge through peer reviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have not invested sufficiently in using performance management to drive and measure improvement. • Further investment needed in consultation and mainstreaming successful community engagement approaches. • Insufficient investment in prioritisation. • Strategic approach to financial and budget management under-developed. • Insufficient investment in human resource issues, some weaknesses persist and there is a lack of a strategic, corporate strategy. • Internal challenge is weak.

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some good examples of learning from others. • Examples of learning from BVRs and through experience. • Accepts and uses feedback from audit and peer review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited self-awareness overall. • No corporate approach to review and evaluation. • Some structures for disseminating learning are not being used effectively for that purpose.
Future plans	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of good plans including: county-wide and Council E-Government plans; and plans to implement recycling services, and improve education on waste minimisation and recycling, and enforcement. • Political commitment is good and the establishment of new priorities and development of strategic plans is progressing. • Partners are effectively engaged in planning for the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No overall financial strategy or human resources strategy in place. • Capacity for stronger leadership and strategic planning is uncertain. • Track record of not completing initiatives. • Plans to tackle some weaker areas of performance are not clear – community engagement and mainstreaming the approaches of the NMTs, benefits, street cleaning.

Scoring key:

1 – Weak

2 - Weaknesses outweigh strengths

3 - Strengths outweigh weaknesses

4 - Strong

Appendix 2 – Progress monitoring against the findings of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment

- 1 The original comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999 and published in 2003/04.
- 2 Under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 ('the Act'), best value authorities have a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions, having regard to the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. By virtue of sections 10 and 13 of the Act the Audit Commission may carry out inspection activity to ensure that a best value authority is complying with this duty, and may issue a report as to its findings. This progress monitoring activity and reporting to assess improvement falls within sections 3, 10 and 13.
- 3 The main elements of this progress monitoring report were collation and analysis of evidence from:
 - self-assessments of progress made, completed by the Council;
 - appointed auditor evidence from performance and financial audit activity;
 - audited performance indicators;
 - reviews of key corporate documents including performance reports, committee papers and management reports; and
 - interviews with councillors and managers.
- 4 This progress monitoring report for Mansfield District Council was collated by the Audit Commission and reflects evidence gathered over the period from January 2005 to January 2006.
- 5 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 reporting progress and updating and improving any improvement plan as appropriate.