

Corporate Assessment Report

June 2006



# Corporate Assessment

**Rutland County Council**

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## Introduction

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

- 4 The JAR covers all services for children and young people that are directly managed or commissioned by the Council, as well as health and youth justice services provided by other bodies. It focuses on the contributions made by services to improving outcomes. The separate JAR report covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that such services work together to improve outcomes. The description and judgement in respect of children and young people in this report is summarised from the JAR report.

## Executive summary

- 5 Rutland County Council is performing adequately. Its performance in the shared priority areas is generally satisfactory with some clear strengths - for example services for children and young people, but also some clear weaknesses - such as promoting healthier communities. It has limited longer-term ambitions for the area and faces challenges in its capacity to deliver its priorities. Some internal processes, such as performance management are not fully effective.
- 6 The Council delivers good value for money overall, despite having significant financial constraints. The Council has the second highest council tax level in the country and council reserves are low at £1 million. The Council's spending per head of population is the fifth lowest of all unitary authorities and it has low unit costs. Its priority services of education and social services are generally high performing, and 42 per cent of national performance indicators are in the top 25 per cent. This focus on value for money is allowing the Council to maximise its limited resources. However, prospects for improving value for money are uncertain due to the lack of any routine review of costs, the lack of use of information about costs, and limited progress in securing shared services or in efficiencies resulting from e-government.
- 7 Overall ambitions for the area are short-term and lack quantified outcomes. The Council listens to local people but its communication of its ambitions is weak. The approach to consultation is reactive and the approach to using intelligence about local need lacks rigor. It has however developed better ambitions for children and young people, and relationships with strategic partners are good.
- 8 The Council's clear priorities are education and social care and it has increased resources for these. Its main focus is on statutory duties and the Council struggles to identify non-priorities. All national shared priorities are not consistently reflected in the Council's priorities.
- 9 The Council's capacity is limited, and it is clearly committed to working in partnership to increase capacity and improve services. Its membership of the Welland Partnership, for example, has enabled the Council to deliver IT projects such as the one-stop shop which would have been difficult to achieve independently. But the constraints of the Council's size means that continuing to balance its finances, staffing and other resources overall remains a challenge.
- 10 Leadership provided by the senior management team is adequate. The Council has increased strategic management capacity by establishing the Strategic and Operations Boards, and in the restructuring of services to children and young people. This enables senior management to have greater focus on those decisions necessary at a strategic level.

- 11 Councillors provide good community and political leadership and support the capacity of the Council well. There is a very low ratio of residents to councillors and the Council uses councillors' skills effectively. Relationships between councillors and officers are good and the active involvement of councillors in the running of the Council is extending the Council's capacity.
- 12 The Council's performance management arrangements are inadequate. The corporate performance management approach is not embedded and there are some serious weaknesses in important areas.
- 13 The quality and extent of user focus within the Council is variable. The Council is not fully effective in identifying the diverse needs of all groups of users within the community. There is an assumption within the Council that, because of the county's size, councillors and officers are well-informed about the needs of its residents. There is a danger, however, that the views and needs of vocal majorities lead to the needs of less prominent sectors of the community being overlooked.
- 14 Communication of the Council's strategic aims and achievements is not consistently effective, and so residents are not adequately aware of what the Council has done or plans to do. Where consultation has taken place the Council has not always fed back the outcomes to its consultees. The Council has developed a communications strategy to address the weaknesses it has recognised.
- 15 There are good arrangements for public involvement in the development control and licensing committee, and the decision-making process is transparent and effective. Where specific parts of the community will be affected by changes, the Council effectively engages with residents.

## Areas for improvement

- 16 The Council needs to develop long-term ambitions with outcome-focused plans, milestones and targets to address the identified needs and concerns of all sectors of the community. These ambitions should address diversity and equality issues by consulting and engaging with diverse and minority groups and ensuring their needs are being met.
- 17 The Council should improve the communication of its ambitions, plans, the outcomes of consultation and its achievements so that local people are aware of what the Council is doing to improve the quality of life for all.
- 18 Governance arrangements for the range of partnerships in which the Council is involved need to be reviewed in order to increase transparency and ensure adequate performance management and the smooth resolution of any possible disputes in the future.
- 19 The Council needs to improve its performance management arrangements by the following.
  - Improving the information available for performance monitoring. Performance measures should extend beyond the Council's strategic objectives and best value performance indicators. They should include indicators measuring outcomes in the areas of national shared priorities and to measure achievement of the Council's strategic aims.
  - Increasing senior management involvement in performance management. The Strategic and Operations Boards' role in performance management should be better defined and more frequent than at present. Chief officers should also take a higher profile role in presenting performance management information to councillors' meetings.
  - Clarify the arrangements for the involvement of the scrutiny function in the management of the Council's performance and make any changes to current processes as appropriate.
  - Collecting and analysing complaints data to identify and deal with poor performance or to identify areas of possible service improvement.

## Summary of assessment scores

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

**\*\*Rules for determining the overall corporate assessment score**

## 10 Corporate Assessment | Summary of assessment scores

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

## Context

### The locality

- 20 Rutland is located in the East Midlands and is characterised by its small size. The county covers only 382 square kilometres. At the centre is Rutland Water, one of the largest man-made lakes in Europe. The area is predominantly rural in nature and has a total population of 36,500. Oakham and Uppingham have a population of 16,000 between them, with the remainder scattered throughout 44 villages and other hamlets. The availability of transport is therefore extremely important to the people of Rutland. Rutland Water provides water to much of East Anglia and is a site of special scientific interest.
- 21 The population of Rutland grew by 5.5 per cent between 2001 and 2004, a rate over three times the national and regional average. It is expected that the population will continue to grow at a steady rate with a projection of 41,000 residents by 2021. The current demographic profile reflects regional trends with the exception of a low number of people from black and ethnic minorities who represent 1.9 per cent of the total population (700). The population density is extremely low, with less than one person per hectare of land. This leads to small pockets of social deprivation, but the county is generally affluent, being 343 out of 354 authorities in the ODPM's index of deprivation (where one represents the most deprived). There are low levels of crime.
- 22 Rutland's economy is based on small businesses. Castle Cement at Ketton, produces 11 per cent of the UK's cement output and employs more staff than any other business. Another major employer, Lands End Direct Merchant is based in Rutland, as a result of targeted inward investment. The county has two major military bases – RAF Cottesmore and St George's Barracks and two prisons – Ashwell and Stocken. Independent education is a feature of Rutland with Oakham School and Uppingham School, as well as a number of primary/preparatory schools. Unemployment is well below regional and national averages at 0.6 per cent.

### The Council

- 23 The Council has 26 elected members who govern on a non-political basis: 14 Conservative, 6 Independent, 4 Liberal Democrat, and 2 others. While holding an overall majority, the Conservatives have not formed a political group and do not exercise a party whip. Three members have formed a political group - the Rutland Independent Scrutiny Group - led by the UKIP member with one other and one Liberal Democrat.

- 24 The Cabinet of seven comprises five Conservative members, one Liberal Democrat member and one Independent member. The Cabinet member portfolios are: corporate; children's services; adult social care, health and housing; planning, highways and transportation; environmental services; and cultural services and economic development.
- 25 The scrutiny function is carried out by a scrutiny commission comprised of the chairs of the four scrutiny panels: adult social care, health and housing; children and young people; environment; and corporate. There are four regulatory standing committees: development control, licensing, standards, and employment and appeals.
- 26 The Council's senior management team comprises a chief executive and four chief officers, who lead four departments: children and young people's services; adult social care, health and housing; corporate services; and community services. The Council has 558 employees overall.
- 27 For 2005/06, the Council's net revenue budget is £38.5 million with a capital programme of £13.7 million. For 2005/06, council tax rose by 4.9 per cent. Despite Rutland's spending per head of population being the fifth lowest of all unitary authorities, the level of council tax was the second highest in England and the highest for all unitary councils in 2005/06. It is considered by many citizens to be too high. Since achieving unitary status, the level of government funding has been a focus of concern for Rutland and the Council has been proactively campaigning for an increase in its formula grant funding.
- 28 The local strategic partnership (LSP), Rutland Together is chaired by an independent member of the public, and brings together the public sector, including the Council, police, and health and the private, voluntary and community sectors. The Council provides the secretariat to the LSP. The Council is also a member of the Welland Sub-Regional Strategic Partnership (Welland Partnership) which brings together five councils all sharing similar rural characteristics.

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

### Ambition

- 29 The Council's overall performance in this area is inadequate. Overall ambitions for the area are short-term and lack quantified outcomes. The Council listens to local people but its communication of its ambitions is weak. The approach to consultation is reactive and the approach to using intelligence about local need lacks rigor. It has however developed better ambitions for children and young people, and relationships with strategic partners are good.
- 30 The Council has worked with partners to set out shorter-term ambitions for the area. These are good for children and young people but are not sufficiently robust or long-term in other areas. The newly adopted community plan covers only the period 2005 to 2008. The Council's corporate plan extends only to 2008/09. It has identified five key aims and objectives with actions to achieve the objectives of the community plan. These are as follows.
- To provide improving innovative and economic public services whilst making best use of all resources, human, financial and environmental and promoting inclusion.
  - To develop our environmental, social and economic infrastructure to ensure that people in Rutland can live, work and enjoy a high-quality of life making our wider community sustainable for the long-term.
  - To adopt innovative and contemporary approaches to social care and health provision via partnership working to develop accessible and inclusive local services for local people.
  - To make Rutland a safer, healthier and more inclusive community where all have the opportunity to achieve their personal goals and enhance their wellbeing through sustainable sports, activity and cultural infrastructure.
  - To develop integrated children's services that ensure that the needs of children, young people and their families for health, wellbeing and learning are met using a partnership approach.
- 31 Uncertainties about the future of the Council under local government reorganisation also limit the Council's ability to plan effectively to deal with issues and ensure continuity. This results in a short-term operational focus, rather than a strategic approach to address communities' longer-term needs.
- 32 The Council's corporate strategic priorities generally reflect the aims and objectives of the community plan, but there are some gaps. For example, there are no targets for improved health and wellbeing of all members of the community through quality physical, leisure, artistic or cultural activities, or for lifelong learning for all. It is not clear how the Council will support the achievement of these objectives.

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

- 33** Many of the Council's ambitions lack quantified, measurable outcomes. They are inwards focused and process orientated, for example *'to establish a disability resource centre adjacent to the planned mainstream sports facility by 30 June 2008'* and *'to enable capital funds to be made available for investment in service infrastructure by the maximisation of the realisation of two council assets (Barleythorpe Hall and Ashwell Depot) by 30 September 2006'*. Without clear articulation of the expected outcomes the Council and community cannot be sure it is meeting identified needs.
- 34** The Council does not have sufficiently clear and challenging ambitions to address diversity issues. While its published equality scheme meets the minimum legal requirements, it does not cover religion and faith, or older people in its plans. Numbers of some diverse groups are very small or widespread, representing a different type of challenge from that in more densely populated areas. Senior managers recognise that this places a special responsibility on the Council to ensure that these needs are catered for in the way in which the Council plans and delivers its services, but there are no details of how this special responsibility is to be exercised. The lack of specific ambitions for meeting the Council's obligations to small, diverse groups means that it cannot be confident that diversity issues are fully integrated into its planning or service delivery.
- 35** There is a lack of clear understanding of local needs of all sectors of the community as the basis of the Council's strategies and plans, for example in education, social care and plans for diverse and minority groups. Joint data collection and analysis is poor although there is some benchmarking and some sharing of data through partnerships and professional networks. There is also a problem of Rutland data not being available, because of the way in which data is presented when collected by a larger partnership. This means the Council is less well-equipped to identify gaps and shortfalls in provision and reduces its ability to plan services and the allocation of resources. The projected increases in local population make the need for effective forward planning more acute.
- 36** The Council's overall approach to developing ambitions based on a shared understanding of needs is limited and its effectiveness in identifying the needs of all sectors of the community is weak. There is a heavy reliance on informal and reactive engagement with local people. Councillors have good links with community partnerships and groups which helps to identify broad community needs and concerns. Ad hoc consultation exercises are carried out but their effectiveness is limited. For example there is an annual open meeting to discuss options for the council tax increase, but this was not well attended in 2006. Other consultation on policy and service issues relies on postal questionnaires distributed with the Council Newsletter, but the response rate is low. The lack of rigorously representative information means the Council cannot be sure it is identifying or addressing the needs of all its communities.

- 37 The Council has undertaken a comprehensive consultation of public, staff, young people and children regarding the Vision 2010+ for educational provision in Rutland. The Council has considered the full range of options and consultation responses. This has resulted in a number of significant changes to the subsequent policy, which has now entered another stage of consultation with communities to ensure understanding and gain commitment to the revised proposals.
- 38 The Council has shown effective community leadership through championing important local issues. Through a housing needs study and a public exhibition, low public concern regarding the lack of affordable housing was transformed into the issue becoming a community priority. This has resulted in an increase in the number of affordable houses being built.
- 39 The Council uses partnerships well to address local challenges. It has many enabling partnerships with the voluntary sector, for example with Voluntary Action Rutland where the Council gifted land to them in return for a new day centre. It is also involved in a safety camera partnership with Oakham and Uppingham Town Councils. This enhances the Council's capacity and widens access to services.
- 40 The effectiveness of the Council's communications is weak. The Council's strategic aims are not consistently effectively communicated to all stakeholders. Plans and priorities are communicated well to partners, who generally feel that they understand and agree with the Council's plans and priorities. However, there is a lack of awareness among the public of what its strategic aims are, and ambitions are not clearly communicated to staff.
- 41 The Council does not communicate effectively on what it has achieved and how it has used consultation to shape its plans and actions. As a result, some partners and stakeholders are unsure whether the Council takes effective action on the consultation it carries out. For example, the presentation of the proposals to create a new children's centre in Uppingham did not reflect that the Council had researched children's views and that the interests of local children and parents were of paramount importance to the Council. As a consequence some local people felt that the decisions had already been made prior to the public consultation.

## Prioritisation

- 42 Prioritisation is adequate. There is good overall intelligence, but a lack of detailed needs assessment as the basis for prioritisation. All national shared priorities are not consistently reflected in the Council's priorities. Education and social care are clearly prioritised, accounting for 67 per cent (£25.6 million) of the net 2005/06 budget. However, there are no outcome-focused strategic objectives to develop healthy communities, and the Council's focus on older people is limited to those in social care rather than the needs of the wider population.

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- 43** The Council has generally linked corporate, service and financial strategies, but plans and priorities are not consistently aligned with resources. The three-year medium-term financial strategy is linked to strategic priorities. However, departmental draft budgets for 2006/07 do not refer to any of the Council's strategic aims, but primarily reflect the impact of inflation and changes in demand for statutory services.
- 44** The Council is currently constrained in what it is able to address on the local agenda and does not seek to add to that agenda because of resource limitations. For example, due to financial constraints rather than local needs, it has delayed the introduction of a county wide kerbside recycling scheme until at least 2008. Its progress in meeting its statutory recycling target is below the national average.
- 45** The Council has made affordable housing a priority, to address a shortage of affordable homes. This has increased the number of affordable homes although this is still below identified levels of need. Other decisions have been made on the basis of consultations and engagement with community groups, for example the provision of six nursing beds in Barleythorpe, to meet the care needs of vulnerable elderly people within the county rather than them having to travel.
- 46** The Council has not effectively linked its corporate plan to the community plan or its own vision. The overall aim of the community plan has been substantially transferred to the corporate plan to be one of five strategic aims. While many of the community plan's objectives are incorporated to some extent by the Council's corporate plan, one of the community plan's objectives 'a safer and stronger community' has very few strategic objectives in relation to it. Additionally, it is not clear how the strategic objectives in the corporate plan are derived from consultation with local people. This undermines the corporate plan's validity as a plan reflecting the needs of the local community.
- 47** The Council's priorities are not consistently based on an understanding of local need.. Councillors have high community involvement with parish councils and community groups, and so know about many issues that matter to the wider local community. However, priorities are not consistently based on the needs of all sectors of the community, particularly diverse and hard to reach groups. There is reliance on informal and reactive feedback rather than basing priorities on systematic methods. This means the Council is aware of the needs of the wider general community, but lacks detailed information on minority groups and needs.
- 48** The Council does not have a well developed approach to address diversity issues effectively. Its equal opportunities statement in the best value performance plan is internally focused and is about council staff not service delivery. The Council's ambitions in relation to race equality are adequate but not ambitious. For example, the Council is planning to achieve only level 2 of the equality standard by December 2007. Without a systematic approach to diversity, the Council may not meet or address the needs of minority or vulnerable groups effectively.

- 49 The Council's approach to target setting is mixed. Most strategic objectives have clear targets, but they are not consistently outcome-focused or SMART<sup>1</sup>. For example, one strategic objective is *'to successfully integrate health and social care services for children and people with learning disabilities'*. There are, however, no outcome targets or milestones so the public cannot see what this means in terms of service improvement. Only 2 out of the 137 policies in the local plan (adopted in 2001) have SMART targets which are measurable. Targets are not set across all areas across the Council so performance and achievement cannot easily be monitored.
- 50 Service planning is not well developed. Plans are limited and do not give a clear picture of what outcomes have been or are planned to be achieved in line with corporate priorities. Service plans do not consistently contain SMART and challenging targets to meet strategic aims or objectives. Local indicators are also identified but are not consistently underpinned by SMART targets. Without these the Council cannot effectively monitor or manage performance.
- 51 There is a positive approach to partnership working. Knowledge and priorities are shared with partners so that there is an understanding of each others priorities. Pragmatic use is made of this knowledge and capacity is used to good effect by putting local priorities before national ones where it is sensible to do so. An example of this can be seen with the fire service recognising the lack of risk in Rutland in some areas (deliberate fire setting) and allocating the resource that would otherwise be devoted to that work to the safety and risk reduction agenda by focusing on home risk assessments.
- 52 The Council has taken some limited action to identify non-priorities and to align resources with priority needs. The medium-term capital plan contains three schemes identified as not a priority for funding. However, the relative ranking of priorities are not well understood in the Council. On enquiry, senior managers and staff state that there are no areas of the Council's activities that are not a priority due to the statutory nature of services provided. This approach devalues the Council's claims to have clear priorities to focus its work.
- 53 Stakeholder involvement in action planning is mixed. There has been extensive engagement of the community in developing the objectives of the LSP, to gain commitment to the Vision 2010+ and in the development of the care facilities at Barleythorpe. A Council review of consultation, however, shows that there is an ineffective approach to data analysis and customer comments are not routinely used to inform planning, so the best use of feedback is not being made.
- 54 The Council is prepared to take difficult decisions for example to close schools and to introduce parking orders in Uppingham. These are in line with priorities to improve the quality of services for local people.

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<sup>1</sup> SMART - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound

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

### Capacity

- 55 The Council's capacity to achieve its ambitions and priorities is adequate. The Council has taken some significant steps in recent years to maximise its capacity, particularly by working through partnerships, but the constraints of its size means that continuing to balance its finances, staffing and other resources overall remains a challenge.
- 56 The availability of financial resources is a specific challenge for the Council but there is a strong commitment to delivering value for money. The Council's balance of national and local funding contributes to the area having the second highest council tax level in the country. Council reserves are also low, at £1,000,000. But the Council has low unit costs and delivers generally high levels of service performance in many areas. In an environment with significant financial constraints, this focus on value for money is allowing the Council to maximise its limited resources.
- 57 There is clear and strong political leadership and councillors support the capacity of the Council well. There is a very low ratio of residents to councillors, meaning councillors have good links with the general public. The Council also uses councillors' skills effectively. The Cabinet is made up of members from different parties and no political groups operate other than the Rutland Independent Scrutiny Group. Cabinet members introduce reports to Cabinet and actively participate in strategic discussion of the underlying issues. They are well briefed on the contents of reports and are willing to make amendments to the recommendations they are being asked to make. Relationships between councillors and officers are good, with close and regular contact taking place, although sometimes with a focus on detailed operational issues.
- 58 The Council's approach to scrutiny does not provide sufficiently clear accountability and decision-making to support improved service delivery. The Council does show commitment to scrutiny, and has commissioned a review but its approach is still developing. There is little evidence that scrutiny is having a substantial impact on Cabinet decisions. There is no consideration of forward plan of decisions to be made by the Executive, allowing better agenda planning. The different roles of scrutiny are insufficiently defined and understood. Poor definition of roles mean that members are not always clear about what is expected of them and as a result decision makers are not always held to account.

- 59 Leadership provided by the senior management team is adequate. The Council's recent restructuring, which introduced the Strategic and Operations Boards, has made decision-making clearer, and enhanced capacity, with senior officers working constructively together to make effective decisions. It provides some separation between the decisions necessary to manage service delivery, and those decisions necessary at a strategic level to manage the interface between members and officers. The Strategic Board has a forward plan and discussions during the meeting are constructive. Because the change is recent there are few significant outcomes but it is clear that the Strategic Board now has more capacity to act on strategic issues.
- 60 Communication with staff about the Council's priorities and objectives is mixed. During the Children and Young People's Services restructuring, whole staff briefings and away sessions were held, and the Council's shared drive is used to ensure that important information such as minutes from the Strategic Board are widely accessible. Poor document control on the shared drive sometimes means that managers are not sure if they are using up-to-date policies and documents.
- 61 The overall approach to workforce planning, staff retention and recruitment, and staff development and training is not sufficiently developed. A personnel and training strategy was produced in 2005 and is linked to the Council's vision and aims, but the accompanying plan lacks baseline data and specific, quantifiable performance measures. Effective action has been taken to reduce levels of staff absence and performance is in the top 25 per cent nationally. But recruitment problems have had a significant impact on performance in some areas with key posts proving difficult to fill, for example in housing, planning and adult social care. The Council does not have an approach to addressing these particular issues corporately, although the problems have existed for some time. Without a clear approach to workforce planning the Council cannot ensure that current and future needs are met.
- 62 The Council is generally using IT and e-government initiatives well to improve public access to services, but improvement has not been as comprehensive as originally envisaged. The Council is in the top 25 per cent nationally in terms of the percentage of its interactions with the public that are capable of electronic service delivery but there have been delays bringing services online, although the Council's website has been re-launched and is now more effective. The performance of the Council's customer service team has improved significantly in its second year, although fewer services than expected have migrated over, and therefore the Council's customer service one-stop shop initiative remains limited.

**20 Corporate Assessment | What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?**

- 63** The Council's risk management arrangements are not well-developed. A strategic risk management group has been created and risk factors are identified in all reports to members. The arrangements are, though, still at an early stage, with only recent reporting to Cabinet on risks, and risk management training has not taken place for service managers. The corporate risk register is only considered by members on an infrequent basis, and risk analyses contained in Cabinet reports do not document the actions required to manage the identified risks. Until the arrangements are fully embedded, it will be difficult for the Council to be sure that all risks are being managed effectively.
- 64** The Council has a successful track record in procuring major projects and services through a variety of different methods. Many of its services are outsourced. The Council has a procurement strategy, but it does not have robust information about current spend or easily accessible systems to identify who is procuring goods and services. This leads to a fragmented approach to purchasing and procurement.
- 65** The Council does not have a fully effective approach to diversity issues. Whilst the Council has a commitment to taking forward work on equalities and diversity, its work in this area is still developing. There is an Equalities Group within the Council, but diversity issues are insufficiently embedded in the Council's plans and rarely go beyond minimum compliance with legislation. The Council has also used the Citizen's Advice Bureau to identify some hard to reach groups across the county, but awareness of issues relating to hard to reach groups is not comprehensive across the organisation. The Council cannot be sure it is meeting the needs of all of its employees or residents.
- 66** The Council has a positive approach to partnership working and generally partnerships are effectively used to enhance Council capacity. As a relatively small organisation, there is a strong recognition that partnerships are essential. The corporate plan clearly outlines how the Council will work in partnership to deliver services. For example, the Council is planning to implement pooled budget and governance arrangements with relevant partners for the lead commissioning of learning disability services by 30 April 2006. The Welland Partnership also allows the Council to deliver projects such as the one-stop shop which would be difficult to achieve independently. The Council seeks grants through joint bidding processes and uses other public agencies as delivery agents. Joint working is increasing the sustainability of projects. This means that the Council is able to maximise its resources, deliver more services, and a wider range of opportunities, than would otherwise be possible.
- 67** The Council works closely with non-statutory partners such as schools and with voluntary organisations. Support for the local volunteer centre brings rewards in the shape of extra capacity, especially for services to older people. This approach helps enhance the Council's capacity.

- 68 The Council's ethical framework is fit for purpose. The Chairman of the Standards Committee is independent and this is enshrined in the Constitution. Independent members comprise at least 25 per cent of its membership. Councillors are aware of their responsibilities under the ethical framework, and demonstrate this through their frequent disclosure of personal interests even when non-prejudicial. There are very few referrals to the Standards Board. This means that the Council is well placed to meet its responsibilities to provide a clear ethical framework.

## Performance management

- 69 The Council's performance management arrangements are inadequate. The corporate performance management approach is not embedded and there are some serious weaknesses in important areas.
- 70 Although the Council has made some investments in the area, they have not delivered better management of performance. The Council has developed a comprehensive and detailed performance management toolkit for managers, designed as a reference document. But the toolkit is very unwieldy at 161 pages long and it covers some areas in more detail than others, making it inaccessible for most staff. We were also unable to locate the document on the Council's shared drive, a key place for sharing information across the Council. Much of the investment has yet to deliver the returns expected in terms of improved performance management arrangements.
- 71 Performance indicator results, together with other more comparative data, indicate that robust arrangements are not in place to achieve consistent continuous improvement and to ensure that performance management has a significant impact on service outcomes. While the Council can point to examples of focused improvement such as the improvement in the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate assessment of 'weak' to 'excellent' from 2003 to 2005, the overall performance of the Council has dropped relative to other councils since the last corporate assessment. In 2002/03, the Council had 69 per cent of its best value performance indicators (BVPIs) in the top half of national performance with 50 per cent of these in the top 25 per cent. Relative performance has consistently fallen since then, and in 2004/05 the Council had only 55 per cent of these indicators in the top half of national performance, with those in the top 25 per cent having dropped to 42 per cent. This demonstrates that performance management arrangements are not delivering continuous improvement.
- 72 The information available to monitor and manage performance corporately is infrequent and insufficiently comprehensive. Performance monitoring reports for Cabinet are only produced quarterly. They are not yet linked with financial monitoring reports, although the Council plans to do so in 2006. They document only BVPI performance and progress against delivery of the Council's strategic objectives. Without comprehensive information about the Council's performance, councillors are unable to make corporate decisions about relative priorities.
- 73 Performance management of partners is not systematic and not all key information is reported to executive or scrutiny, so the Council cannot tell how effectively partner organisations are achieving the Council's objectives.

**22 Corporate Assessment | What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?**

- 74** There is a lack of a performance management culture in the Council. Neither the Strategic Board nor the Operations Board monitors the Council's performance on a regular or consistent basis. Whilst the Council has appointed a member of staff to co-ordinate performance management, this individual is not a member of the Operations Board and does not routinely report on performance to senior officers. The co-ordinator presents performance information to Cabinet meetings, rather than either the chief officer or portfolio holder responsible for performance. This indicates a lack of leadership from senior officers in relation to the importance of performance management in the Council.
- 75** The scrutiny function of the Council does not take an effective role in monitoring and managing the performance of the Council. Performance monitoring by councillors involved in the scrutiny function is limited to the reviewing of BVPIs by the Scrutiny Commission. The poor level of involvement by scrutiny members in performance review weakens the Council's ability to focus on priority issues and take timely remedial action.
- 76** The Council does not use complaints effectively to drive service improvement. In 2004/05, the Council took on average 53.3 days to respond to first stage complaints received. This is nearly twice the national average for dealing with such complaints. Additionally, the Council does not routinely analyse complaints or enquiries received to identify emerging trends and any necessary service changes. This means that the Council is unable to identify and deal with poor performance quickly.
- 77** The Council uses opportunities to learn from its own successes and failures and from good practice in other councils, but sometimes is slow to respond. The Council initiates its own learning by, for example, sharing information and learning with partners in the Welland Partnership. It also responds to external feedback on performance, for example, responding to a negative report from the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate on the Council's counter-fraud arrangements. New arrangements such as the formation of the Operations Board are intended to improve learning between departments. Progress is sometimes slow however. For example, weaknesses in performance management within the Council have been identified systematically by the Council's auditors and inspectors and yet performance management arrangements have not substantially improved.

## What has been achieved?

- 78 Overall, the Council's performance in achieving outcomes against the shared priorities is adequate. It has maintained good performance in some areas and made improvements in others, but this has not been universal. The Council is active with some good local initiatives in a number of areas but can not always demonstrate a strategic approach to some issues, nor clear outcomes.
- 79 The Council has made good progress overall in developing sustainable communities and improving transport and its performance indicators in this area are generally good. It has implemented many of the projects which were originally planned when the Council came into existence in 1997, such as the Oakham bypass. It has been particularly successful on achieving more accessible transport and affordable housing. This focus on the development of the local infrastructure is having a positive impact on both employment and quality of life.
- 80 The Council is also generally working well with its partners and together they have been successful in reducing crime and disorder by 19 per cent overall in 2004/05.
- 81 The Council has made some progress in promoting healthier communities and narrowing health inequalities but does not have ambitious plans in this area. The county has low deprivation, high life expectancies, and generally good health and wellbeing such as further reducing teenage pregnancies in the county. However, community consultation in relation to health matters is underdeveloped and the Council has yet to develop a strategy to promote healthier communities.
- 82 The Council has not developed an effective strategic approach to older people as citizens. The older people's strategy and action plan focuses primarily on social care issues rather than addressing the needs of the wider population. It is not clear how this action plan will be achieved in partnership with others. Adult social services are judged by CSCI to be serving most people well, and to have promising prospects for improvement. Consultation has resulted in improved facilities at the new Barleythorpe care facility to provide independent living units with nursing care provision for older people on the same site.
- 83 Outcomes for most children and young people in Rutland are good. They are safe, with those most at risk safeguarded by prompt, effective action by all agencies. Most children and young people are healthy but the local area does not have sufficient grasp of the health needs of all. Children enjoy strong parental support, which contributes to them achieving well, and attainment in schools is better than the national average. But this is less the case for looked after children whose attainment is too low. At 16, a high proportion of students remain in further education and a good number go to university. There is a reasonable range of recreational opportunities, but transport difficulties and the cost of activities are barriers for some. Children and young people are well supported through good relationships with adults in all services, which helps them develop positive attitudes. There is progress towards providing integrated services, but this is hampered by the lack of a comprehensive needs analysis and of baseline data upon which priorities for action and realistic, challenging targets can be based.

## Sustainable communities and transport

- 84 The Council has good performance overall in developing sustainable communities and improving transport but is weaker in planning and waste management.
- 85 The Council has achieved a number of significant infrastructure improvements for the county. It is building the Oakham bypass; it has a successful Oakham Town Partnership; the number of affordable homes built exceeds the targets set and it has improved bus usage. The majority of stakeholders surveyed agree that *'the Council works effectively to promote the quality of the local economy and environment'*.
- 86 The Council is providing community leadership in developing skills required by the local labour market. While unemployment is low at 0.6 per cent, 61 per cent of employed residents travel to work outside the county. The Council is seeking to attract employers who will help create a more diverse economy. The Leader has held business breakfasts with local employers in order to gain feedback. It is trying to address the employment skills gap in the county through effective liaison with local businesses and the three out-of-county colleges to provide apprenticeships and training for Rutland young people. Thirty apprenticeships have been created in the current year. It is also developing small business incubator units with local schools. This work is seeking to balance employment supply with demand in the county, to further support a sustainable community in Rutland.
- 87 Performance by the Council's planning service has lagged behind other councils for some years, but this is distorted by the very small numbers of major applications involved in the calculations. All but one of the key indicators of performance in relation to the determination of planning applications are in the worst quartile of performance, although the indicators have all improved since 2002/03. Rutland has been designated a Planning Standards Authority for 2005/06. However, the planning service is now fully staffed and this is helping to improve performance. The Council has designated 34 conservation areas and developed nine parish plans. Some planning services can be accessed and transacted electronically.
- 88 The Council is making good progress with delivering affordable housing and is achieving well against national and local targets for managing the supply of new housing. It has exceeded its LPSA target and 145 affordable homes have been built and plans for 92 more. Nonetheless the demand for affordable housing continues to exceed supply. This has led to a shortage of labour in the area, resulting in employers bussing some of their workforce in from surrounding areas.

- 89 The Council, working in partnership, is delivering on the green and environmental sustainability agenda through specific projects, but in some cases it is too early to see quantified outcomes or the data is simply not collected. Projects encourage recycling and composting. These include competitions for schools and businesses, and local councillors set an example by being active in environmental organisations. The Council is actively seeking to mitigate the environmental impact of the Oakham bypass and to protect bio-diversity, including grass verges. The Council is making an adequate contribution to environmental management.
- 90 There is a commitment to minimising and recycling waste but progress has been slow and limited by financial constraints. Recycling performance is limited by the lack of kerbside recycling facilities across the county. Despite consultation exercises showing that the public have an appetite for further recycling initiatives, only 22 per cent of household waste is recycled or composted. This amounts to only 72 per cent of the statutory standard for 2005/06, which is in the bottom 25 per cent of performance nationally. Only 8 per cent of the population is served by a kerbside collection of recyclables, putting future achievement of statutory performance standards at risk until this is addressed.
- 91 The performance of the Council in relation to transport issues is good. The condition of its roads and pathways, as measured by BVPIs, is in the best 25 per cent nationally. All pedestrian crossings have facilities for disabled people. The Council is meeting the needs of rural communities through bus services and travel tokens for taxi use by older people and it has the highest satisfaction rating in the country in relation to its home to school transport service. While 71 per cent of residents think traffic congestion is getting worse, the Council has taken action through the development of the Oakham bypass.
- 92 The Council is seeking to encourage modes of transport other than the car. The LTP2 vision encompasses a strategy for modal transfer to walking and cycling. Bus patronage has increased by 86 per cent. Public satisfaction with local bus services and public transport information has substantially improved so that it is now above average. The number of passengers using local buses almost doubled in 2004/05. The Council has improved cycling provision by the creation of 17.5 kilometres of shared use cycleways and the completion of four new cycleways. This provides the infrastructure which needs to be in place before the public change their transport choices.

## Safer and stronger communities

- 93 Rutland is a very safe county with low crime levels. The responsibility for community safety is with an elected member who is not part of the Cabinet but the Leader takes a keen interest. The Council is generally working well with its partners and together they have been successful in reducing crime and disorder, especially in volume crime target areas. Overall, crime levels have fallen by 19 per cent in 2004/05. Burglary from dwellings has been reduced by 42 per cent, vehicle crime by 20 per cent and criminal damage by 17 per cent. This helps to give reassurance to the public and to reduce fear of crime.
- 94 The Council is good at balancing national and local safety priorities. It has interpreted national targets and priorities by considering the local context in Rutland. For example it has prioritised home fire risk assessments, a fire prevention issue for local vulnerable people, and invested less time in the national arson reduction targets, due its lower profile as a local issue. Similarly, the focus for reducing overall crime numbers is centred on burglary and theft from vehicles which are local priorities. This results in the Council focusing on the crime issues important to local people.
- 95 The Council has used partnership working successfully to address anti-social behaviour issues. Partnership initiatives such as the application for a designation order in Uppingham have worked well. This designation order limits activity related to alcohol in Uppingham. Whilst partners are not clear about the possible displacement of crime elsewhere, a recent review of this work has demonstrated clear and significant reductions in crime and alcohol related disorder and anti-social behaviour in the target area. Learning from this has been shared and others are considering this learning with a view to implementing it elsewhere (for example in Oakham).
- 96 The Council does not have clear data about the level of drug or alcohol misuse in Rutland. Information about drug treatment is mostly limited to the three-year crime and disorder audit. The current drugs and alcohol plan does not provide detailed data specific to Rutland. Similarly, at the time of the inspection no formal link existed between the local accident and emergency department for referral of drug or alcohol misuse to other agencies. This reduces the Council's ability to form strategies to deal with drugs and alcohol misuse issues based on local needs.
- 97 Rutland has a well-developed set of plans for some emergencies but its business continuity arrangements are underdeveloped. For example, key partners are unclear how to implement these plans if the need arose, in particular, if the main contact was unavailable. These limitations in emergency planning put the Council's operations at risk in the event of a major crisis.

- 98 The Council is inadequate at fulfilling its obligation under s17 of the Crime and Disorder Act which requires that the Council take account of the impact of its actions upon crime and disorder in its decision-making. This issue has only recently been identified by the Council and it is in the very early stages of being addressed by the use of an audit and gap analysis. There is no evidence that this has yet had a positive effect.
- 99 Performance in improving road safety is mixed. Improved road safety is being targeted through traffic calming measures, responsive speeding signs across the county, and through new highways safety schemes. Road deaths and serious injuries have reduced relative to the baseline but the trend had been upwards over the past two years and is currently not on track to meet the national 40 per cent casualty reduction target by 2010. Slight injuries have declined by 15 per cent.
- 100 The Council actively promotes active citizenship and community engagement, although the impact is mixed. The Oakham Town Partnership has resulted in an Arts Festival, grant aid to promote tourism and the development of new cycle paths which were identified through engaging the community. However, only limited numbers of residents attend open consultation meetings for example on council tax. The county's youth parliament is active, with a recent election producing a turn-out of 50 to 60 per cent. This contrasts with the county election turnout of 37 per cent, which the Council would like to improve upon.

## Healthier communities

- 101 The Council has adequate performance in promoting healthier communities and narrowing health inequalities but does not have ambitious plans in this area.
- 102 The population of Rutland as a whole is healthier than nationally or regionally as measured by nationally available statistics. Rates for live births, life expectancy, premature death and the number of teenage pregnancies all compare favourably with the regional and national picture, and have continued to improve.
- 103 The Council does not have a comprehensive picture of health needs or inequalities across the county. Whilst there is limited data specific to Rutland available on national priority issues such as teenage pregnancies, coronary heart disease and life expectancy in general the Council does not have detailed information about the health of Rutland residents specifically. This limits the ability of the Council to have an impact on health inequalities relevant to Rutland and leads the Council to solely respond to national initiatives such as healthy schools and sexual health initiatives.
- 104 The Council is successfully promoting healthy lifestyles through a limited range of initiatives for children and young people. Ninety-six per cent of the area's schools are participating in the national Healthy Schools Programme, and the Council is able to point to some outcomes such as increased participation in sports schemes. This means that children and young people are being encouraged towards healthier lifestyles.

- 105 Rutland has seen a steady decrease in under 18 conception rates since the baseline year 1998, passing the national target in 2001 for a 15 per cent reduction by 2004. The reduction of 44 per cent achieved to date is the best performance nationally, over four times the national average, and brings the Council close to delivering the national 2010 target of a 50 per cent reduction.
- 106 The Council uses partnerships to deliver health outcomes for the community. For example it has established the Jules One-Stop, in partnership with Connexions to deliver confidential and impartial advice regarding contraception and pregnancy testing through trained youth service staff. The Council's use of partnerships means it can boost its limited capacity in this area.
- 107 The Council lacks a proactive approach to improving health outcomes and reducing health inequalities. Whilst the Council has a number of relevant strategies to address health issues, such as having a Child Health Strategy and policies to promote sports participation, it does not have a comprehensive strategy to address health issues within Rutland based on local needs. Health issues are only formally reviewed twice a year when the adult social care, housing and health scrutiny panel invites health partners to discuss health issues. These discussions focus on issues such as ambulance response times, rather than monitoring or management of health outcomes. This lack of a strategic approach limits the impact that the Council can have in improving the health of Rutland communities and to reduce health inequalities.

## Older people

- 108 The Council has not developed an effective strategic approach to older people as citizens that goes beyond health and social care and covers the areas that older people say are most important. The Council has produced a final draft strategy for older people's services 2005 to 2009. While the aims of this address national priorities to provide a basis from which to meet the principle requirements of 'Independence, Wellbeing and Choice', the focus is primarily on health and social care issues and so does not meet the needs of the whole older people population.
- 109 The Council is not responding effectively within its strategic action plan for older people to address issues of concern to the wider older people population. The results of consultation, knowledge about the county and from sources such as the 2001 census highlight that transport, housing and fuel poverty are issues of concern for older people, but these are not reflected in the 2005 to 2009 strategic action plan.
- 110 The 2005 to 2009 action plan of the older people's strategy is inadequate. It identifies no quantified outcome-focused targets or milestones, accountabilities or resources or how this will be achieved in partnership with others. It has 45 action points, of which 33 are health and social care related, for example to develop a 24-hour intermediate care service. Seven are general, for example to enable user involvement in the development of local support networks.

Only five go beyond health and social care, for example to enhance the mobile library and home library service. This results in a lack of a broader strategic approach to planning and delivering services for the wider older people community.

- 111 The Council's service plans do not contain specific actions or issues to identify or address the needs of older people, so it is uncertain if any effective action will be taken either within departments or in a co-ordinated way across the Council to address the needs of this sector of the population.
- 112 The Council works well with its long-established older people's services forum, Voluntary Action Rutland (VAR) and partners in health to agree a shared approach, particularly on social care issues. This has resulted in improved facilities at the new Barleythorpe care facility to provide independent living units for older people (72 beds and 28 bungalows), with elderly care provision located on the same site. The new community plan broadly reflects the same social care focus for older people as the older people strategy, although it also contains some community wide objectives such as 'to improve accessible and inclusive education and lifelong learning for all learners of all abilities'. However, there are no specific action points relating to older people.
- 113 The Council has limited approaches to identifying the needs of the older population. Heavy reliance is placed on public meetings and the good links with health, VAR and the older people's forum, and the fact that most councillors are older people. However, partners express concerns that while views are sought, consultation is ineffective as the Council has its own agenda, although they can be effective on specific issues. This results in an overall lack of detailed knowledge of needs of the wider community and excluded and hard to reach groups.
- 114 Information on services, facilities and groups for older people is not readily available or well communicated. A search of the Council's website and of Rutnet, the community portal supported by the Council, gave very little information on services for older people or what support was available through VAR. Performance indicators for 2003/04 show that only 45 per cent of older people think that the Council keeps them informed about the services and the benefits it provides. This places the Council well into the bottom 25 per cent of all councils. Older people may not be aware of what is available for them in the county.
- 115 The Council has many examples of effective working in partnership with health, the voluntary sector, the independent sector and other partners. For example, delayed discharges are very rare in Rutland due to close working with the PCT. The Chater House residential care home has been developed, funded from private capital. It gives financial support to VAR who have an extensive range of schemes including a volunteer car scheme to improve transport links. These enhance capacity and improve the quality of life for residents.

- 116** Adult services are judged by CSCI to be serving most people well, and to have promising prospects for improvement. The service is commended by inspectors for its achievement in promoting independence for older people. The Council tries to integrate older people into local communities through having a good spread of sheltered and specialist housing across the county enabling older people to stay in their communities. Increased investment in the use of intensive home care and other supportive services has resulted in a reduction in the use of residential care placements.

## Children and young people

- 117** The Council is providing strong leadership and working effectively with a range of statutory and other partners towards the provision of integrated children's and young people's services. The Director of Children and Young People's Services, the lead councillor and the children's and young people's strategic partnership are in place and working effectively together. The improvement of outcomes for children and young people is a clearly stated high priority for Rutland. A draft children's and young people's plan (CYPP) has been produced. This contains a clear and challenging vision based on the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes. The plan is supported by ten objectives, further broken down, as appropriate, into aims aligned with the ECM five outcomes. The draft CYPP is currently out to consultation and provides a good base for the development of integrated services.
- 118** The Council and its partners acknowledge that a comprehensive needs analysis is essential to effective prioritisation and target setting, but that this is currently lacking. Action to address this is amongst the priorities for action for the children's services directorate, demonstrating awareness of the building blocks essential to maintain and improve the quality of service. There is effective use of resources, and overall service management, value for money and the capacity to achieve further improvements in children's and young people's service, are adequate.
- 119** Local services in Rutland have a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people. The combined work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good. Children most at risk are well safeguarded by prompt and effective action by all agencies. Childcare providers and fostering arrangements are good and agencies undertake the appropriate staffing checks. A significantly lower rate of children and young people are killed or seriously injured in traffic accidents than the national average, and there is a low rate of admissions of under 18s to hospital.
- 120** The general support given to parents and carers to keep their children healthy is good, however, targeted support for more vulnerable groups is less well-developed. There is good provision of services for physical health needs and very good provision for mental health needs, although 16 to 18 year olds who have left school cannot access mental health services. An absence of a sufficient needs analysis prevents effective targeting, for example, of substance misuse.

- 121** Children and young people generally enjoy their education and where they live, and achieve well. The Council gives good support to early years settings and has strengthened its processes for monitoring and challenging the performance of its schools. Pupil attainment is good and their progress is satisfactory overall. Standards improved in each key stage in 2005 and are better than the national averages and in line with or above similar authorities. There is good participation in recreational and leisure activities. However, cost and transport issues can be barriers for some children and the youth service is currently inadequate. Young people in more isolated villages have difficulties accessing recreational and other services.
- 122** Most children and young people behave responsibly. The Council and its partners are increasingly seeking the views of children and young people and elected members and officers are receptive to such views. Consultation is not yet however a consistent aspect of service design and delivery and it is not clear that action is taken as a result of this consultation or that the outcomes are fed back to young people.
- 123** Local and regional services work well together in helping children and young people achieve economic wellbeing. There is a high proportion of young people continuing into education and training beyond the age of 16 and more vocational options are now available at age 14 than in the recent past. Very few young people are not in education employment or training. Overall course achievement is high and success rates in work-based learning are good. There is insufficient Rutland specific data available on achievement upon which the local authority can monitor the progress of local young people. Insufficient short-term crisis accommodation is available for young single people within the area.

## 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 Rutland County Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 9-20 January 2006.
- 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.