

Corporate Assessment

June 2008



Corporate Assessment

Rushcliffe Borough 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 and Improvement

Executive summary

- 3 Rushcliffe Borough Council has made good progress in improving services and how it operates since its last corporate assessment. In 2003 the Council was rated as good; it is now an excellent council.
- 4 The borough is an attractive place to live and work, and the Council has clear ambitions for the borough. It is working effectively with partners to deliver its vision and is developing new partnerships to ensure it can continue to deliver effective and efficient services, and deliver its ambitions. The Council works effectively locally, including with town and parish councils, regionally in various partnerships and sub-regionally. Partners' views are valued, and partners see the Council as an organisation that delivers what it promises.
- 5 The Council provides good leadership across the borough. The Leader and Chief Executive both have a high profile and work effectively. Officers are enthusiastic about their own roles and are responsive to change. Councillors work effectively. Communication, internally with officers and councillors, and externally with local residents and partners, is good and used to reinforce key messages and the Council's ambitions. The Council's ambitions are stated clearly, addressing a wide range of issues including crime, young people and the environment, and are well understood by officers, councillors, partners and local residents. However the Council does not have clear, explicit ambitions relating to the anticipated level of housing growth in the borough over the next 15 years.
- 6 The Council has clear priorities that reflect local need. It has reviewed its priorities in response to changing needs and in response to consultation. It is working well with local communities and other providers, such as the County Council and the Primary Care Trust, to deliver its priorities, including town centre improvements, reducing crime and disorder, high recycling rates and improved efficiencies such as £2 million (over five years) through a new leisure management contract.
- 7 The Council is well placed to deliver its priorities. It has effective structures and good decision-making arrangements. Systems are reviewed and adapted as needed. It has the financial resources needed to deliver its ambitions and has been effective at improving value for money. It delivers high quality services at low cost. Savings made from improved efficiency are redirected into priority services.
- 8 Its approach to performance management is supporting the delivery of its priorities, both within the Council and through its partnerships. It has reviewed services and made changes to improve outcomes for local people and is ensuring services are available to everybody. It is putting in place arrangements to support new partnerships, although these are not yet fully effective.

- 9 The Council has delivered against its previous priorities. Local people are satisfied with the Council and it has the highest level of satisfaction of any English district council. It is also one of the cleanest boroughs and has one of the highest levels of recycling and composting in England, and has achieved other priorities such as providing more affordable housing and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

Areas for improvement

- 10 To ensure that its ambitions accurately represent the challenges and opportunities facing the borough, the Council should ensure that its 2020 vision for the borough is clear about:
 - how the borough will take account of housing growth in line with national expectations;
 - what benefits should be harnessed from this anticipated growth; and
 - the impact of growth on the borough's vision over the next 10 to 15 years.
- 11 Performance management within the Council is working well and is developing effectively in partnerships. But the Council needs to ensure that these arrangements are reviewed and adjusted as the needs of the partnerships change and in particular to respond to issues such as crime, anti-social behaviour and health inequalities.

Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*	Weighted score
What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3	6
	Prioritisation	4	8
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	4	8
	Performance management	3	6
What has been achieved?	Achievement and Improvement	4	28
Weighted score			56
CPA category			EXCELLENT
*Key to scores			
1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance			
2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance			
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well			
4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly			

**Banding thresholds for determining CPA category

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

Context

The locality

- 12 The borough of Rushcliffe is in south Nottinghamshire, just south of the River Trent and the city of Nottingham. The borough covers an area of over 400 square kilometres, including sub-urban areas to the north and mainly rural to the south and east. The largest town is West Bridgford, where one-third of the population of the borough lives, which is also home to various sports grounds including Nottingham Forest Football Club, Trent Bridge Cricket Ground and the East Midlands Gymnastics Centre. The National Water Sports Centre at Holme Pierrepont is also located within the borough. Other towns include Bingham and Cotgrave, and larger villages include Radcliffe-on-Trent, East Leake, Keyworth and Ruddington.
- 13 Around 108,000 people live in the borough (mid 2006 estimate). There is a higher than average White British population, at 93.3 per cent compared to 92.1 per cent for the rest of the East Midlands and 87 per cent for England. White Other is the largest single minority population at 2.6 per cent. The BME population is spread throughout the borough and a small but growing number of eastern Europeans are choosing to make Rushcliffe their home. There is no geographical concentration of particular minority groups. Rural isolation and access to services are issues for some communities.
- 14 It is a relatively affluent area, ranked at 331st out of 354 (where 1 is the most deprived and 354 is the least deprived) and no area is identified as within the most deprived 10 per cent. However, there is localised deprivation within certain estates, and rural isolation is a problem in some areas. Gross weekly pay is £532 per week, significantly higher than the region average of £429 and the English average of £370. Unemployment in the borough is 2.3 per cent, which is about half the national average.
- 15 The borough's population has grown by 11 per cent since 1991. There are 43,670 households in the borough. In recent years, an average of 360 new homes have been built each year, exceeding the requirement of the existing Joint Structure Plan. However the draft East Midlands regional spatial strategy (RSS8) anticipates population growth and new household formation to require an extra 13,875 homes in the borough in the period 2001 to 2026. This would mean a rate of 555 additional dwellings a year. At the moment, the borough does not have an up-to-date local plan that allocates enough housing development land to meet this need. The Council is in the early stages of preparing its local development framework (LDF) which will address this.
- 16 Educational achievement in the area is high. Two-thirds of 16 years old achieved five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C in 2005/06, compared to the national average of 58.5 per cent, and the regional average of 55.2 per cent. Almost 40 per cent of the economically active population have a degree (or higher) compared to less than 20 per cent regionally.

- 17 Life expectancy in the area is high. The average life expectancy across the area is 82.1 years for females and 79.3 for males compared to 81.1 and 76.9 respectively for England. Mortality rates are lower than average for England for circulatory diseases, cancer and suicide. Teenage conceptions are low at 20.1 compared to 41.6 nationally, but there are significant health inequalities across the borough. For example, smoking-related illness is high in Cotgrave, and across the borough, road injuries and deaths are significantly worse than the English average.
- 18 Overall levels of crime are high compared to levels in similar areas, although levels are falling. All levels of crime are high including robberies, domestic burglaries and theft of and from a motor vehicle, when compared to other areas, but are lower than most other Nottinghamshire districts.

The Council

- 19 The Council comprises 50 councillors. Thirty four are Conservative, 11 Liberal Democrat, 2 Labour, 2 Green, and 1 Independent. The Council operates the leader and cabinet model of governance. There are four scrutiny committees; two that consider what the Council has done - Performance Management Board, and Corporate Governance Group, which are both chaired by the opposition group. The other two consider what the Council could do. They are Place Shaping and Community Engagement, and Partnership Delivery, and these are chaired by the controlling group.
- 20 The Council employs 360 full-time equivalent posts. The Council has recently restructured to support new priorities adopted in September 2007. The senior management team (SMT) consists of the Chief Executive and three deputy chief executives. Each of the deputy chief executives looks after two service areas, one that delivers services to local residents and one which is more about how the Council is run. Each deputy chief executive also has named responsibility for delivering some of the strategic action plan which supports the Council's priorities, as well as a specific responsibility for a particular geographic area within the borough. There are six Heads of Service who, with the deputy chief executives, form the corporate management team (CMT).
- 21 The Council's net revenue budget for 2007/08 is £13.3 million (including parish precepts and special expenses) and the capital programme equalled £4.4 million. Spending per head and council tax levels (£103.95 for a band D property in 2007/08) are among the lowest of all district councils in England.
- 22 The Rushcliffe Local Strategic Partnership is chaired by the leader of the Council. The Council is one of three partners in a joint, pilot, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP), with Broxtowe Borough Council and Gedling Borough Council. It has recently entered in to a partnership with a private sector company to run five leisure centres, and has transferred its housing stock to a Housing Association - Spirita. The Council has a range of other partnerships to deliver its priorities. It is at the final stages of negotiation with a neighbouring council and a private company to deliver back office functions such as HR, IT and revenues and benefits processing.

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

Ambition

- 23** Rushcliffe Borough Council is performing well in this area. The Council is an ambitious council with a strong sense of direction in shaping local services and places, and most of its ambitions are well understood by councillors, council officers, partners and residents. However work on developing borough-wide ambitions about growth in housing in the borough over the longer term is at an early stage.
- 24** With partners, the Council has developed a clear, locally distinctive vision for the borough's future looking towards the year 2020, based on the theme of 'Rushcliffe - great place, great lifestyle, great sport'. The vision expands on this theme, building on the borough's existing strengths such as its environmental stewardship, its sporting and recreational assets and the quality of life of its residents but it also recognises the key challenges ahead. These include the borough's changing demographic profile and the housing, recreational and health needs that arise from this, and delivering outcomes that address specific needs in particular localities. The vision ensures the Council, the local community and partners have shared long-term goals and that these take account of national priorities, as well as local needs and aspirations.
- 25** However, the Council does not currently have clear, explicit ambitions relating to the anticipated housing growth in the borough over the next 15 years. It has clear plans for the development and adoption of the borough's Local Development Framework (LDF) which will need to address national and regional expectations for housing growth. But public debate about the likely impact of large-scale housing development has only been triggered by specific sites coming forward for development. This is because the Council has not yet started an open and constructive debate with local communities about the link between the borough's vision and the regional growth agenda. This slightly weakens the overall ambition of the Council, although the Council has clear plans for the adoption of the LDF.
- 26** Councillors and officers, partners and residents are clear about what the Council's contribution is to the borough's vision. The Council's medium-term priorities (2007/11), are to:
- help to deliver a sustainable environment;
 - pursue effective partnership working to deliver improved and accessible public services within Rushcliffe and the East Midlands region;
 - reduce levels of crime and anti-social behaviour to make people feel safe;

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- increase community involvement in decision-making;
- help children and young people to achieve their potential and make a positive contribution to society; and
- deliver efficient and effective high quality services.

This clarity is supported by a good consensus between councillors from different political groups about the Council's ambitions. Residents are also supportive and knowledgeable about these ambitions and their knowledge about what the Council is trying to do is not limited to areas where the Council is already performing well.

- 27 The Council communicates its ambitions well. This is in part because the Council's leadership provides a clear voice over issues that matter most, including promoting the Council's values as well as its ambitions. In addition, councillors and officers adopt an intelligent and consistent approach to internal and external communications. This includes an excellent tri-annual magazine for all the borough's householders called Rushcliffe Reports, and a broad range of electronically published staff and residents' bulletins. Successful communications campaigns are used to encourage community involvement in shaping emerging priorities. For example a recent web-based consultation about glass recycling generated 1400 on-line responses. Such communications ensure there is a strong and effective dialogue with residents and that Council priorities are widely understood.
- 28 Ambitions for the borough are challenging and are based on a shared understanding, between the Council and its partners, of local needs and aspirations. To ensure continued improvement in value for money, the Council has set itself the medium-term goal of securing the best possible value for money through collaboration with other organisations. The Council's back office functions such as finance, human resources, property, IT, revenues and benefits will in 2008 be delivered in a new shared support partnership between the private sector and a neighbouring district council. It is targeted to deliver 10 per cent savings over current costs while improving the resilience of services. In response to not adopting the draft Local Plan, there is a clear and ambitious timetable to adopt the Local Development Framework, and targets for affordable housing remain ambitious, at 50 per year, in light of no major housing land identified. Customer services for the Council and other local service providers such as the County Council and voluntary services will be delivered by 2009 via a purpose-built customer services 'hub', located more accessibly in West Bridgford. While these are ground breaking projects, each has maintained good momentum, reflecting a clear balance of challenge and realism in the Council's ambitions.

- 29** The Council has a long track record of delivering good and improving front-line services such as leisure, benefits, refuse and recycling. However the Council's revised ambitions (2007/11) are bolder still since they also address more complex, cross-cutting priorities dependent on formal and informal partnership delivery, for example about community safety, community engagement and young people. Clear ambitions are being pursued to strengthen the borough's community safety partnership which has worked successfully with two neighbouring district councils in developing a three-way combined partnership. This will ensure a more strategic approach is taken in future, as well as better leadership and vision across South Nottinghamshire in pursuit of community safety.
- 30** The Council is clear about the need to improve how diverse communities across the borough inform the borough's ambitions and plans. A recent independent review, commissioned by the Council, of its approach to equalities and diversity identified strengths, for example, on ensuring rural isolated communities are heard. However, the Council recognises in its ambitions the need for greater systematic involvement of local communities in decision-making. In addition, for the Council itself to make more progress in being representative, relating to gender, age and ethnicity, of the community it serves as well as embedding equalities practices.
- 31** Ambitions are taking shape that will ensure better engagement with local communities via parish councils, local area groups, neighbourhood improvement groups and multi-agency area-based initiatives. Regular liaison meetings between parishes and the Council have recommenced. A more coherent approach to identifying and addressing young people's needs is emerging, through liaison with the Youth Assembly, through the borough-wide play partnership, and a Nottingham conurbation-wide focus on sports and leisure led by the Council. The cross-cutting approach to partnerships is demonstrated clearly with the partnership with Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club, of which the Council is a prominent partner, and which delivers activities to improve health, activities for young people and has secured national and international sports events to the borough. These arrangements ensure ambitions are consistent within and between organisations working in the borough.

Prioritisation

- 32** The Council is performing strongly in this area. Since 2003, the Council has developed a good track record in identifying and delivering its priorities. This has been achieved by ensuring priorities are well understood by those responsible for their delivery and for making key resourcing decisions. Good progress has been made in developing clear plans that translate current aspirations into reality.

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- 33** The Council has a good track record of delivering its priorities. Effective delivery across the priorities set out in the 2004/07 corporate strategy was achieved through robust plans and by maintaining focus on key tasks. The Council has developed a strong track record over this period for delivering improvement even within services that are already performing well. Targets were met, including the building of affordable housing (50 a year), recycling targets (50 per cent) and reducing crime and disorder (a 20 per cent reduction over the 2004/05 baseline). In addition, robust plans have led to the delivery of key projects such as the establishment of the leisure management contract in 2007.
- 34** The Council's new priorities are translated into clear, robust action plans and these are well understood by those responsible for their delivery. A set of 13 strategic actions form the focus of the Council's work to deliver its six 2007/11 priorities and these actions have been staggered over their delivery period to maximise available resources. Tasks scheduled to start early are well developed, such as the shared support services programme and customer services hub in West Bridgford, and supported by clear targets. Preparations for others that are due to begin shortly are underway including development of neighbourhood improvement groups and area-based initiatives, and are linked to other plans and strategies. Strategic actions are supported by service plans and specific project management action plans which maintain the focus on important issues, such as the development of the new LDF and affordable housing. Tasks that have not made adequate progress are scrutinised carefully and remedial work undertaken, for example, in developing a corporate response on climate change and in preparing the core strategy of the local development framework. This provides officers, councillors and the public with confidence that priorities will be delivered.
- 35** Officer and councillor roles and structures are well aligned to the delivery of the new corporate priorities. In late 2006 the Council's leadership was quick to identify and respond to the need to restructure management and delivery teams around the emerging corporate priorities, which are more cross-cutting. A new senior management team (SMT), of four, corporate management team (CMT), of ten, and new portfolio and scrutiny group arrangements for councillors were in place and developing their own work programmes within 12 months. These arrangements are now established and provide a clear focus on cross-cutting work and accountability for the delivery of key tasks.
- 36** Councillors and officers have a strong sense of what is and what is not a priority. From within the six priorities and 13 key strategic tasks, officers consistently identify the tasks that are most important in achieving long-term goals, such as the shared support services programme, or glass recycling. Clear targets help in identifying what needs more attention. Arrangements develop quickly and effectively to ensure their delivery, such as project and implementation groups, and these make the most of officer and councillors' resources.

- 37 Councillors regularly review the relative importance of competing priorities, for example before annual budget setting, and in the allocation of new capital and revenue resources. As a result changes are made routinely to teams to ensure the Council can deliver improvements in priority areas. For example, a focus on anti-social behaviour is now central to the work of the Environmental Health team, while economic development is now enabled through the community and place shaping teams rather than through dedicated posts. Most of the savings arising from more efficient and effective leisure management from 2007 onwards has been reinvested in priorities relating to community engagement and a sustainable environment. This ensures the effective use of Council resources to achieve borough priorities.
- 38 Difficult decisions are taken where necessary and the momentum of key projects is maintained. For example, the Council has a good track record in providing customer services, but recognised the location of its office was not as accessible as it could be. It has pursued options for the community hub, and opened customer contact points in previously un-staffed police offices, without delaying other plans, such as the shared support services programme. This shows the Council is able to change direction and adapt plans as circumstances demand.
- 39 Organisational values are clearly communicated by managers and this has a widespread impact in the way staff tackle everyday tasks. Officers have a positive attitude to change and improvement and make rapid progress with priority tasks since colleagues are supportive, responsive, and well-equipped to help. Cabinet members keep their involvement to strategic level. This means that key tasks such as the review of the Human Resources strategy can be accomplished efficiently, and opportunities can be seized quickly.
- 40 Targeted actions ensure specific groups in the community are encouraged to participate fully in achieving the borough's priorities. For example, the Council organised green awareness events specifically aimed at older people. Local partners in Cotgrave have set about meeting an identified gap in sports provision specifically for girls. The new leisure management arrangements enable a much stronger emphasis on matching leisure provision to the needs of specific groups, such as low income families, black and minority ethnical communities, people with disabilities and people with particular health needs, and action plans to target these inequalities are progressing well. In this way, the Council is achieving better impact from its actions.

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

Capacity

- 41 The Council is performing strongly in this area. There is very strong political and managerial leadership which encourages innovation. This is leading to effective partnerships with neighbouring councils, local organisations and the private sector which is helping the Council deliver cost effective high quality services.
- 42 The Council has strong political and managerial leadership. The Council has restructured to ensure it maintains capacity to deliver its new priorities. This change has been clearly and successfully communicated to staff and to partners, who are equally clear on what the Council is doing. It has achieved major changes and is managing other changes, such as shared services, well. The Chief Executive has taken a personal responsibility to ensure that staff affected by change are kept fully informed about the process. The Council's leadership is open and respectful and there are constructive relationships between heads of service and the strategic management team. This has been achieved through an open style of management which has significantly increased the ability of the Council to innovate and focus on achieving improvements in services for local people.
- 43 Arrangements for political discussion and decision-making are effective and transparent. Roles and responsibilities are clear. In major change initiatives, roles are defined with a cabinet led governance board, SMT lead the project board and officers lead the implementation board. Heads of service are responsible for delivering their service plans but report regularly to their portfolio holder and direct to SMT through performance clinics. Scrutiny has clearly defined roles, and is effective. Budgets and performance management are scrutinised through opposition chaired committees while the leading group chairs groups that consider partnership working, including the LAA and new initiatives through the place shaping and community engagement scrutiny group. This has helped ensure that partners and local residents are clear on what decisions have been made and why.

- 44 The Council values its people, and ensures there are good opportunities for councillors to develop their capacity and expertise. The Council is committed to the regional member development charter and is supporting this through, for example, personal development plans for councillors which were undertaken by IDeA for the Council, and linked through a member development panel. Councillors have active personal development plans supported by training and workshops which are well attended. Training for councillors is often delivered at flexible times, such as the workshops for planning and development control which were run both as afternoon and evening sessions, which 46 councillors attended over both sessions. The Council is ensuring that its councillors are trained and equipped to make a valuable contribution.
- 45 Good working arrangements help increase the resources available to deliver improvements. Flexible working arrangements are available for staff, and are being used effectively to deliver extra capacity. Over 100 staff have full remote access to the Council's IT systems and remote working is embedded in many sections, such as Environmental Health where inspectors complete documents on site and upload them directly to the IT system. Overall sickness levels across the Council have reduced from 10.1 days in 2003/04 to 7.65 days in 2006/07, which is helping the Council improve productivity. Generic working has been introduced to improve service resilience. In revenues and benefits this has led to improved processing times while maintaining already high accuracy levels. Succession planning is integrated into officer personal development plans and supported by training and work experience. Overall, this helps the Council respond effectively to the changing demands it faces, although the Council's workforce is not yet representative of the population it serves.
- 46 Overall financial capacity of the Council is very good, and forward planning is used effectively to identify issues that will impact on the Council. There is a good capital programme and clear financial planning. The Council is debt-free. Accounts are subject to robust scrutiny by councillors, and the medium-term financial strategy supports the Council's priorities. Finances have been diverted to deliver priorities including affordable housing and recycling. Previous issues around a low proportion of spend against the capital budget have been resolved by identifying issues and taking clear robust action, including supporting voluntary sector partners who were responsible for some of the under-spend. Good financial arrangements mean the Council is well placed to deliver its ambitions for the borough.

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- 47** The Council achieves and improves value for money. In the 2007 Use of Resources assessment, the Council performed strongly in its approach to value for money; overall costs are low and services are high quality. High cost services are identified through benchmarking and then subject to review. An example is the management of the Council's leisure centres, which has led to significant savings, equivalent to £400,000 a year over five years. Further savings are obtained by working in partnership with a wide range of partners. Ultra-low sulphur diesel, for the waste and recycling collections, is purchased in partnership with Nottingham City Council and Nottingham City Transport, with an annually agreed bulk price, and it works well with other councils through shared officer posts and joint IT use. The Council's focus on improving value for money is delivering real improvements for local people.
- 48** Partnerships are used effectively to increase the ability of the Council to improve services and meet priorities. The Council has a good history of working in partnership with others. It has worked with the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) over health inequalities, jointly funding a health development officer and running several joint events around smoking, obesity and healthy eating. Weeks of action have delivered successful improvements to local residents through a wide range of partnerships including police, fire and County Council. The police and Streetwise team meet fortnightly; issues are addressed and new initiatives discussed, such as training the refuse collectors to look for signs of cannabis growing, and street cleaners being trained to identify cannabis plants among fly tipped rubbish. This is helping the Council respond to the changing needs of the borough.
- 49** Arrangements for managing risk are effective and reviewed frequently. The Council has learnt from external reviews and strengthened its approach to risk management. Consultants have been involved to review risks and train councillors on risk management. Service plans and Council reports include details of the risks. Risks are reviewed regularly, for example by the Project Implementation Board on Shared Services. The Council's risk register is reviewed regularly and risks are ranked and then colour coded so high risks are immediately apparent. It includes links to the Council priorities and strategic action plan. Effective project management helps mitigate risks further, and clear project initiation documents (PIDs) clearly highlight risks together with issues around equality and the environment. Regular reviews of implementation identify areas for learning which help reduce risks further.

- 50 There are good arrangements to ensure officers and members work within the ethical framework. Although arrangements to promote ethical standards are not fully utilised, as there has been no attempt to develop a structured work programme for the Standards Committee, there is a clear and effective protocol for working between officers and councillors. The independent chair of the Standards Committee links to the Council through the Council's monitoring officer. Officers support councillors on community engagement in line with the Councillor/officer protocol, such as when councillors helped consult the public over the introduction of glass recycling. The number of complaints received is low and none have been referred to the national Standards Board. Working within a clear ethical framework helps demonstrate openness, promotes accountability and maintain public confidence in local councillors.
- 51 The Council has invested to improve capacity and improve access for services. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) have been carried out for all services, and are now being reviewed again. The Council acted on the findings of the EIAs and changed how it delivered services. Environment Health provide basic food hygiene courses in relevant languages such as Cantonese and Greek. The difficulty of access to Council services in rural towns and villages has been resolved by working with the police to open customer contact points at previously un-staffed police offices. Working with the County Council has led to plans being well developed for the new community hub in West Bridgford. Policies have been reviewed and amended to ensure that rural areas are not excluded to the benefit of urban areas ('rural proofed'). The website has been improved and a range of transactions can be carried out online, translated into numerous languages and is suitable for screen-readers so people with restricted eyesight can use the website. The Council has secured resources to ensure services are more accessible to local people.

Performance management

- 52 The Council is performing well in this area. Since 2003, when following the previous CPA inspection, this area was identified as an area for improvement; the Council has made good progress in embedding performance management as a key value of the Council. Systems are well established and used to effectively improve performance. Learning within the Council and from others is encouraged, and both officers and councillors are involved in performance management. Partners are involved, although arrangements are still developing in many areas including the LSP and leisure.

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- 53** There is a strong and effective culture of performance management within the Council. 'Tight control of performance' is one of the Council's values and this is supported by a clear framework that is well implemented involving staff through personal development plans and service plans, and councillors through Performance Management Board. SMT is involved through weekly performance clinics. All performance is linked to key targets that support corporate priorities, and staff view performance management as integral to how they work. For example, in recycling, low performing areas were targeted by particular refuse rounds and through extra promotion, linked to the previous corporate priority of reducing waste and increasing recycling. Rates in poor performing areas have now improved. Performance management is helping improve services throughout the Council.
- 54** Senior officers and councillors are all involved in performance management. There are regular meetings between heads of service and the relevant portfolio holders to discuss performance issues. SMT reviews one service area each week as part of their performance clinic - each service is comprehensively reviewed every other month. Progress against targets is reviewed along with resources. Councillors are involved through the performance management board which receive quarterly performance management reports. These include details of all performance and clearly highlight exceptions and risks, so the Council can consider intervention, and highlights good performance for praise. This information is used effectively to escalate issues. For example, the performance clinic identified the growing number of planning appeals facing the Council. This issue was then discussed at the performance management board, who considered options for dealing with this and made recommendations to Cabinet. This ensures the Council responds effectively to meet targets and responds to changing needs.
- 55** Good use is made of action plans, which include clear targets, timescales and identify a responsible officer, for improving services and managing change. The strategic action plan, to support the Council's priorities, identifies a deputy chief executive with overall responsibility for each plan. Outcomes are detailed where they are known, and supporting plans contain links to other plans and clear outcome targets, linked to service plans. The Council acknowledges that more work is needed to embed this fully and to make plans fit for purpose at first draft, but has put in place plans to roll this out across the Council. It has also put in place arrangements to check that plans are fit for purpose before being adopted. For example, the draft climate change plan did not meet the Council's requirements in that the action plan was not SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound) and it is reviewing the plans before adopting them. Project and programme management are effective with clear roles to deal with governance, project management and implementing changes. Clear plans with explicit targets make it easier for the Council to manage performance and change.

- 56 User feedback, complaints and staff views are used to improve services. Each week, the Council randomly contacts 10 per cent of people who have contacted the Council. This collects information on the satisfaction of users on how their issue was dealt with, and views on the overall outcome. Complaints and drops in satisfaction are investigated and robust action taken when appropriate. For example, although overall satisfaction with the cleanliness of the borough is high, 28 per cent of those surveyed expressed some concern about particular issues. This was investigated and the cleanliness of trunk roads identified as a concern. The Council has started negotiations with the Highway Agency to improve the cleanliness of these roads. This consistent approach to seeking and using feedback ensures the Council remains responsive.
- 57 The Council integrates performance management into plans and policies. The Asset Management Plan, for example, includes targets and measures on satisfaction, use of facilities, such as car parks and the civic centre, and income. These targets are linked to other strategies, ensuring plans and policies consistently support the Council's priorities.
- 58 The Council is working with partners to manage performance, although the approach is not yet consistent across all partnerships. Working across the three district CDRP is effective and priorities and targets drive initiatives. For example, the Weeks of Action plans start with a review of all partners' priorities, a review of trends and comparison of performance across the borough. The performance management board is used to scrutinise the performance of the LSP and other partnerships including leisure and the South Nottingham Home Improvement Agency (SNHIA). But arrangements within the LSP are not as robust, and annual scrutiny does not allow time for intervention when issues are identified. Plans are in place to improve performance management in these areas, such as an action plan following a peer review of the LSP improvement plan. In other partnerships, the Council has supported partners to develop and improve performance management. As a result, many partnerships are meeting their stated objectives, and work is progressing well to achieve the full potential in others.
- 59 Benchmarking and learning from others is well used to help improve services. As part of the development on Shared Services, the Council visited other councils, visited centres operated by private sector bidders and used consultants to review the progress and approach adopted. The Council implemented this learning, for example, an external review of Shared Services, in November 2006, recommended that the Council make the project objectives more explicit. The Council reviewed the overall progress, made the objectives more explicit and adjusted the project plan accordingly.

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

- 60** The Council provides clear and accessible information on its performance. The Council's own magazine, Rushcliffe Reports, is well read and local people know how well the Council is performing against key priorities, such as the borough's recycling rate. Information is provided to a wide range of publications, including those for BME and rural communities. The Council helps rural parishes develop Parish Plans and a jointly funded rural officer helps rural communities secure funding. In 2007/08 £750,000 was attracted into parishes via bids supported by the rural officer. However, the Council's approach to providing clear information is driven by good access to services rather than through the diversity and equality plans. A new corporate equality plan is being developed.

What has been achieved?

Achievement and Improvement

- 61 The Council is performing strongly in this area. It is working with partners to deliver improvements that matter to local people. This is reflected in the highest satisfaction of any English district council; 73 per cent of local people are satisfied with the way the Council provides local services.
- 62 The Council adopted new priorities in September 2007. However, in assessing the Council's overall achievements, we have considered the previous priorities of the Council, and in particular the six priorities that relate directly to local people. This is because it is too early to see outcomes the public will recognise relating to the recently adopted Council priorities for the period 2007 to 2011.
- 63 The Council's 2007/11 corporate plan clearly outlines that some existing priorities have been mainstreamed, such as affordable housing and dealing with health inequalities. Other priorities have become broader and more cross-cutting, such as 'help deliver a sustainable environment'. Particular areas that require greater improvement, such as reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, and helping young people achieve their potential, remain as specific priorities for the Council.
- 64 Service performance is strong. Thirty eight per cent of indicators are in the best performing quartile, which is above average for English district councils. The Council has improved services in its priority areas, and maintained improvement in other areas. It is among the top performing councils in council tax collection, housing benefits, sickness absence, speed of planning applications, per cent of recycling and composting, cleanliness and participation in sports and recreation. Satisfaction levels are high in waste collection, cleanliness of the borough, sports and leisure centres and parks and open spaces. However, it has not systematically improved performance on diversity and equality issues and all indicators concerning how representative the workforce is of the local population are performing below the median level.
- 65 Where services were underperforming, the Council has taken successful action to deliver sustained improvements. Following intervention, significant improvements have been achieved in the cleanliness of the borough and the proportion of waste recycled and composted. The overall volume of crime, although high, has reduced by 18 per cent since 2003/04.

A cleaner and greener environment throughout the borough

- 66 The Council has successfully improved the local environment. Following poor performance in cleanliness and low satisfaction with the cleanliness of the borough, the Council launched its 'Streetwise' initiative in 2005. This initiative aimed to deliver what local people wanted. Cleanliness of the borough has improved from 25.1 per cent of land not meeting acceptable standards (as measured by the BVPI 199a) to 5.3 per cent in 2006/07, one of the best performing councils in England.

- 67 Satisfaction with the local environment is high. 83 per cent of local residents (adjusted to account for deprivation) are very satisfied or satisfied with the cleanliness of public space, and 80 per cent are satisfied with local parks and open spaces. The local country park - Rushcliffe Country Park, was created on 200 acres of ex-Ministry of Defence land, and was awarded a Green Flag in 2007. It has an active 'friends' group and an extensive education programme which embraces the environment - including a wind turbine, wood fuelled boiler and solar water heating.
- 68 The Council has worked successfully to improve the environment. Working with the LSP, the overall carbon footprint for Rushcliffe residents has been calculated and areas identified such as higher than average domestic energy use, but lower than average for food. A successful fortnightly farmer's market helps promote local food, and has reduced 'food miles'. Over 5,600 tonnes of carbon dioxide has been saved through the Council's approach to promoting home energy efficiency such as improved insulation and low energy light bulbs. The Council has calculated its own carbon footprint, identifying a total of 3,800 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions from its own activities (2005/06 baseline) and has since reduced this by 1,400 tonnes a year by switching all electricity used to renewable sources such as wind and water-power. In response to the Council's new priority of a sustainable environment, it has a strategic action to adopt and implement a climate change strategy.

Reducing levels of crime and disorder

- 69 The Council and its partners have made good progress towards achieving the crime and disorder objectives that are important to the local community. This means there has been a significant reduction in the overall incidence of recorded crime, a major reduction in the fear of crime and an effective targeting of resources on hotspots of crime and anti-social behaviour. However, while levels of crime and fear of crime are low in comparison to other CDRP areas in Nottinghamshire, there remains much to do to bring crime levels down in Rushcliffe in line with similar CDRPs elsewhere.
- 70 The CDRP has made good progress in reducing crime. Against an ambitious target of 20 per cent set out in the partnership's 2005/08 community safety strategy, it has achieved an estimated 18 per cent reduction in overall crime. This is with particularly good progress in the past 12 months and significant recent reductions in the categories of burglary and vehicle-related crime. Fear of crime has also reduced over the last few years. Ninety-four per cent of residents felt safe outside during the daytime in 2006/07 (compared to 82 per cent in 2003/04), with 56 per cent feeling safe after dark in 2006/07, which is a substantial increase from 42 per cent in 2003/04. This means that over the last three years the actual incidence of crime has reduced and residents' perceptions of safety have improved markedly.

- 71 In addressing anti-social behaviour, the Council - as a key partner - has made a significant contribution to area-based initiatives in the borough. The Council supported the police in the Trent Bridge beat, an urban area of the borough, with street drinking initiatives, extra car park patrols, private security firms, and adopting a tough stance on graffiti and litter. This led to dramatic changes with a 24 per cent reduction in criminality in subsequent months. In Radcliffe-on-Trent in a rural part of the borough the Council worked with the parish council to devise and implement an action plan to tackle anti-social behaviour including the use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and eviction orders. In the following months there was a 64 per cent reduction in alcohol-related anti-social behaviour. Some areas such as Bingham have seen a recent increase in crime. The challenge remains to sustain effort and respond rapidly as new hot spots emerge.
- 72 The Council is also supporting county wide efforts to take a multi-agency approach that tackles safety, health and social-related problems through Action weeks. For example, the Cotgrave Week of Action in October 2007 involved a wide range of partners, including the Police, Primary Care Trust, Fire service, County Council, town council and various sections from the borough council. Actions were targeted following an assessment of priorities and using statistics. Various events were delivered by the partners across the town, not only aimed at reducing crime and disorder, but tackling other issues such as smoking and anti-social behaviour.
- 73 Partners across South Nottinghamshire have made steady progress in drawing together an innovative three-way CDRP that works across three local authority boundaries. Partners have put in place the right building blocks to provide a more strategic lead to community safety, and some resource pooling has already been achieved between partners, as well as efficiency savings.

Reducing waste and increasing reuse and recycling

- 74 Since 2002, the waste and recycling services across the borough have been transformed under the 'recycling2go' branding. In 2006/07, 52 per cent of waste was recycled or composted, the third highest English district council
- 75 The service responds to local needs. Kerbside recycling is offered across the whole borough. Flats and multi-occupancy houses are offered communal bins for both waste and recyclables. Publicity is well presented and clearly written, and understood by local residents. A flexible approach has been taken, for example, householders could chose to have a home composting bin instead of a green garden waste collection. Houses that do not have room for three bins are given alternative options such as fewer bins, sharing with neighbours or keeping a bag collection. New soundproofed glass banks are being introduced across the borough following consultation. These were identified as the best balance delivering improved recycling and value for money. The Council has recognised that local glass banks are not accessible to all, and those on an assisted waste collection are being offered the opportunity for their glass to be collected direct from their home.

- 76 The Council is taking successful action to reduce waste and increase recycling. The Council has identified areas where recycling levels are low, and where high amounts of waste still go for disposal, and has effectively targeted these areas with promotion and schemes that reward improved recycling, and recycling rates have increased in these areas. Because recycling and composting levels are very high, the Council has significantly reduced waste taken for final disposal.

Ensuring all residents can live in decent homes and that sufficient affordable housing is available

- 77 The Council has delivered most of what it set out to do following the transfer of the Council's social housing to Rushcliffe Homes, the registered social landlord (RSL) in 2003, (now Spirita). Corporate plan goals have included providing decent homes for all through both social and private sector housing, more affordable homes to buy or rent, and providing a quality service for homeless households and individuals.
- 78 Partners with the Council are making progress towards providing decent homes for all. Spirita, the South Nottinghamshire Home Improvement Agency and the Council continue to maintain and improve the borough's housing in relation to the government's decent homes standard (DHS) and to address other local priorities. The borough's principal registered social landlord, Spirita has been increasing the percentage of social housing meeting DHS, achieving the 'Plus' standard for all transferred housing by 2007 and meeting the 2010 standard early for all properties within the borough. There are good plans, and the finances available, to maintain DHS and meet the plus standards across the borough, including the updating of almost 1,000 central heating systems.
- 79 Working with public and private sector partners, landlords and residents, the Council has been successful in improving local housing. With Gedling and Broxtowe, Rushcliffe Borough Council has recently launched a First Lets scheme which improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the private rental sector in meeting local need. The energy provider, Eon, in partnership with the Council has insulated 550 homes in the borough in the last two years, making warmth affordable as well as producing a saving of 130 tonnes of carbon dioxide. Council and CDRP advice and grants have been used effectively to improve the security of vulnerable people and properties. In this way, the Council is making more of the borough's housing accessible, warm and safe.
- 80 In partnership with registered social landlords, the Council has successfully achieved its goal of providing 50 affordable homes a year since 2003/04. Over 200 units have been provided in the four years to 2006/07, and current completions and permissions are well over the target rate for 2007/08 and 2008/09. The Council and its partners have been able to do this by securing funding and land for affordable housing, despite the general pattern of recent developments in the borough favouring small sites, which under the old local plan, did not have to include any requirement for affordable housing. This makes the Council's achievement all the more significant since it has been successful in addressing the scarcity of land for affordable housing as well as funding.

- 81 Over the same period the Council has worked hard to address specialised affordable housing needs. Some successes are now evident. For example, in January 2007 Hilton Grange opened in West Bridgford. This is a complex of 62 affordable flats to buy or rent, for older people, which resulted from a successful bid from the Council jointly with Nottinghamshire County Council to the Housing Corporation for extra funding. Work with rural parishes has resulted in rural housing needs surveys that identify a need for affordable homes to meet localised housing needs. Specific sites have been identified and two planning applications have now been submitted. These will be the first rural exception sites in Rushcliffe since the transfer of social housing in 2003. Such activities ensure the Council's success in delivering affordable housing is tailored to need local priorities.
- 82 Through its community housing and housing benefits teams, the Council is assisting those in greatest housing need. Housing benefits holds a Chartermark and consistently provides a good service, ensuring timely and accurate claims. The Council has also reduced the length of stay in temporary accommodation for homeless people from 4.8 weeks for bed and breakfast in 2003/04 to 2.5 weeks in 2006/07. Although reductions in the length of stay in hostel accommodation have not been achieved.

Cost effective leisure; promote improved health

- 83 The Council has achieved significant reductions in the management cost of five of its leisure centres while providing capacity and impetus to improve in areas that contribute to other priorities. Good project management ensured the transfer of the leisure centres to a private contractor went smoothly, was delivered on time and delivered significant savings. In a borough where overall health is good, with life expectancy higher than the regional average, health inequalities have been targeted and initiatives delivered in partnership with others.
- 84 The Council has been successful at promoting improved health. It has worked with partners to deliver successful campaigns. A jointly funded (between the Council and the Primary Care Trust) Health Development Officer was appointed in January 2006 and has organised several successful initiatives including a Health Festival targeted at an area in the borough with high obesity rates. Working with the environmental health team helped ensure that some major venues, such as Nottingham Forest Football Club and Trent Bridge Cricket Ground, became smoke free ahead of legislation, and that a successful no smoking campaign was run alongside the national no indoor smoking legislation. Smoking has reduced in the Borough from 21 per cent to 17.6 per cent over the last 12 months.

- 85 There are good arrangements in place to continue to promote healthy lifestyles. The successful 'Adopt-a-Chef' scheme, where local chefs help promote healthy eating and home economics skills in schools, is being rolled out, through promotional material and DVDs, across the borough. The new leisure contract is producing targeted action plans for specific user groups including young people, BME communities and older people, and a GP Referral Coordinator has been appointed to develop this consistently across the borough. As part of the partnership with Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club, young people in Cotgrave and Radcliffe on Trent will have access to evening cricket sessions and coaching staff will deliver professional cricket coaching at local schools.
- 86 Pragmatic decisions were taken to secure a cost effective contractor who delivered the quality the Council needed to run the leisure centres. Learning from elsewhere was implemented well, for example, to assess the bids received on a quality and price basis, which involved an evaluation panel comprised of Council officers and councillors, external consultants and external legal advisors. Timely decisions were made and deadlines reviewed because of emerging findings - for example, extra time was allocated to allow for a smooth transition of staff under TUPE. The overall contract agreed provides savings equivalent to £400,000 a year when calculated over the first five years of the contract.

Meeting the diverse needs of the community

- 87 The Council is meeting the diverse needs of the community. Although some of the specific equality plans are now reaching the end of their life, the Council has both reviewed and renewed its' Equality and Diversity Plan, and demonstrated that it can and does change how it delivers services in response to issues raised. In 2006/07, 88 per cent of local residents agreed their area was a place where people from different backgrounds got on well together, and 83 per cent think their Council treats all types of people fairly. Both indicators are among the top performing within English councils.
- 88 The Council ensures that services meet the needs of the community. All services have completed Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) and changes were made following these. For example, the Council identified that certain arts and community events were attended by more women than men, and young men were particularly under represented. Access for people with disabilities, especially for those with restricted mobility, was also identified as an issue. Alternative transport arrangements were provided, and additional events that appeals to a younger, male, audience, such as the spray arts project for young men, introduced. In recognition that many events have traditionally been based on the Christian calendar the Council started working with Rushcliffe Communities Together, to support users from diverse cultures, developing events for Diwali, Eid and the Chinese New Year. This demonstrates the Council considers and responds to the needs of the local community.

- 89 The diversity and equality implications of its policies are considered before the Council makes a decision. All policies are 'rural proofed', to make sure that policies do not adversely impact on rural communities. All Council reports clearly state the diversity implications of recommendations. Important documents are sent direct to groups representing specific communities, including BME and groups for people with disabilities. Consultation has been undertaken on providing literature in alternative formats, and the website has been reviewed by charities for ease of use by people who are blind or have restricted vision. Close links have been forged between various residents groups and local town and parish councils. The Rushcliffe Youth Assembly is supported by the Council and local youth forums are being developed in smaller towns and villages such as Cotgrave, Keyworth and Bradmore. This all helps ensure the Council is aware of the impact of new decisions before they are made.
- 90 The Council and its services are accessible. Communication is effective through the Council's own magazine and through regular press releases which are sent to local and community-based newspapers and magazines. Translators are available at the Civic Centre, and can be accessed at the five customer contact points across the borough (which are located in police stations). Transactions can be completed on the Council's website which can also be translated into various languages. The Council is effectively meeting the diverse need of its community.

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 Rushcliffe Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 3 March 2008 to 7 March 2008.
- 4 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the Council.