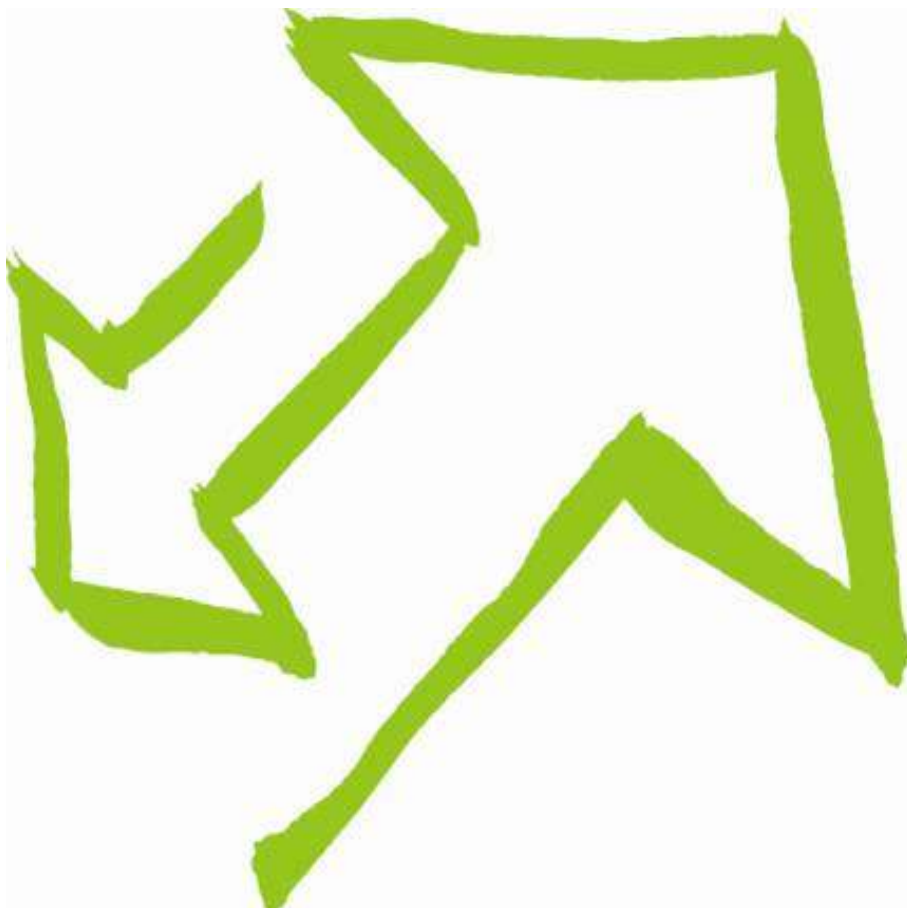


Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Malvern Hills District Council

December 2008



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Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement and Improvement

Executive summary

- 3 Malvern Hills District Council has made good progress since its comprehensive performance assessment in 2004 when its rating was 'fair'. The Council is now rated as 'excellent'. The Council has achieved considerable improvement in delivery across many service areas, and resident satisfaction with services is good and continuing to improve. Performance and cost compare well with other similar Councils. The Council can demonstrate good achievements across many of its priority areas.
- 4 The Council has a sound understanding of its local context and the current and future needs of local people. It has used this understanding to develop clear and challenging ambitions for the district, with appropriate links to regional and national priorities, which are shared by its partners. However, not all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the Council's ambitions. The Council works well in partnership and has an established history of seeking where possible to pursue opportunities to use shared service initiatives to secure value for money. It is actively pursuing an innovative approach to sharing services and management structures with a neighbouring district council.
- 5 A new administration, elected in May 2007, has worked effectively to develop a new, refined and robust set of priorities which draw on the ambitions outlined in the Community Strategy. Important and difficult decisions have been made over issues that are not priorities for improvement, such as community safety, transport and support for the arts, and financial disinvestment made in these areas.
- 6 The Chief Executive has rationalised the senior management team and there is improved corporate working from officers as well as corporate leadership from members. Officers and members work well together. The Council's financial capacity is good and it continues to improve the way it uses its resources. These sound financial arrangements leave the Council well placed to deliver against its stated priorities. The Council has a sound overall approach to developing diversity and equality issues, but this has not yet led to these issues being mainstreamed and embedded within the workforce.
- 7 Performance management is effective and has contributed well to improvements in services over the last three years. There is an embedded culture of performance monitoring in the organisation and the Council uses this well to target service improvement. However, performance management arrangements are not fully developed to gain maximum benefit for the Council, for example, there is an inconsistent approach to using the framework to track priorities.

Areas for improvement

- 8 The Council should ensure that it further develops its approach to performance management to ensure a consistent approach to tracking priorities and to better integrate resource issues, including assets, ICT systems and people. It should ensure that these arrangements extend to managing the performance of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) against the Sustainable Community Strategy priorities. This will enable the Council to more closely focus on delivering its priorities, to better judge its success and achievement of value for money, and enable local people to be clear about the added value of the LSP in improving their quality of life.
- 9 The Council should accelerate its programme of diversity and equality development to ensure it becomes embedded across the organisation as quickly as possible. This will enable the Council to more quickly identify and address any areas of unintentional service inequality which may exist, and ensure that it adequately considers the diverse nature of the district when identifying and delivering priorities.
- 10 The Council should take appropriate steps to ensure that it communicates its ambitions for the area more widely. This will enable local people and stakeholders to be clearer about what the Council is trying to achieve in the long term.

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	3	6
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3	6
	Performance Management	3	6
What has been achieved?	Achievement	3	21
Weighted score			45
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	45-60
Good	36-44
Fair	28-35
Weak	21-27
Poor	20 or less

Context

The locality

- 11 Lying on the western edge of Worcestershire and south of the west midlands region, Malvern Hills district covers 577 square kilometres. The area is dominated by the Malvern Hills which have been designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty and the rivers Severn and Teme which flow through the district. The area's high landscape quality attracts over a million visitors a year.
- 12 The district is mainly rural with three main centres of population. Malvern, in the south of the district, is the main town and is the anchor to the west midlands central technology belt. Tenbury Wells in the north-west grows hops, apples and soft fruits; Upton upon Severn in the east of the district is a tourist and marina town.
- 13 Malvern Hills has 73,900 residents, of which 22 per cent are of pensionable age, well above regional and national averages. Conversely, the area has a below average number of young people. The population is stable but ageing.
- 14 There are 32,610 dwellings, of which 13.2 per cent are rented by registered social landlords.
- 15 Malvern Hills is relatively affluent, although there are some deprived areas. The index of multiple deprivation 2004 ranked Malvern Hills at 241 out of a total of 354 English council areas, where 1 is the most deprived.
- 16 Levels of crime in Malvern Hills are amongst the lowest in the country.
- 17 Based on the 2001 census information, Malvern Hills has a comparatively low black and ethnic minority population of 4.57 per cent.
- 18 Eighty per cent of employed residents work within the services sector. The economy has diversified from agriculture to a new focus on research and electronics and tourism. At the Malvern Hills Science Park, QinetiQ (a research and product development organisation) employs 2,400 people and 16 other technology based companies employ another 170 people. Major employers are also based at the Malvern and Enigma business parks, a partnership of 22 businesses.
- 19 With 1.1 per cent of eligible residents claiming benefits, unemployment is low compared to the national average of 1.5 per cent.

The Council

- 20** The Council, created in 1998, consists of 22 wards represented by 38 councillors. The Conservative group has overall control with 31 seats and the Liberal Democrat/Independent/Green group have 7 seats. The Council has an Executive Committee chaired by the Leader of the Council, supported by a Deputy Leader and portfolio holders for Customer Focus, Planning and Housing, Economic Development, and Environmental Control. The Council also has a Planning Committee (with a southern area development control committee, and a northern area development control committee), an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Licensing Appeals Committee, Licensing Act 2003 Committee, Audit Committee and a Standards Committee.
- 21** The Council has a Chief Executive, supported by six heads of service responsible for Community and Economic Development, Planning and Housing, Customer and Environmental Services, Legal and Governance, Performance and Policy, and Finance and Resources. The Council's gross revenue budget for 2008/09 is £8.96 million and its gross capital budget is £965,000. The average level of Band D Council Tax for 2008/09 is £1,371.59.

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

Ambition

- 22 The Council is performing well in this area. It has used its sound understanding of the local context and current and future needs of local people to develop clear and challenging ambitions for the district. It is taking appropriate steps to enhance its understanding of local needs and aspirations. Its ambitions, which are shared by partners, are linked appropriately to regional and national priorities. However, not all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the Council's ambitions. The Council works well in partnership, using different approaches to leadership where appropriate, and has an established history of seeking to use shared service initiatives to secure value for money.
- 23 The Council has a clear vision, supported by objectives and priorities, for the area with clear links to the vision and priorities of the Local Strategic Partnership. The vision:
- "is of a District which has first class services and facilities, is clean, safe, healthy and prosperous, and has vibrant and active communities".**
- 24 The Council's ambition to ensure that the people of Malvern Hills see a well managed environment, including climate change, local housing needs being met and improving economic viability for the area, is supported by six objectives. These objectives are expressed as clean and green; safe, healthy and active; prosperity shared by all; a connected district; affordable decent housing, and; first class, good value services and facilities.
- 25 The Council has a sound understanding of the local context. Knowledge of local demographics shared by the Council and partner organisations has been used to assess current and future need and drive development of its ambitions. For example, the Council recognises that whilst there is currently an older, ageing population, it also needs to encourage inward migration and investment to ensure the long term sustainability of the area and its communities. It is conscious of the balance to be maintained between on-going provision of services for older people and the need to provide for young families and children to retain them in the area for example by provision of suitable affordable housing and employment. The Council has also worked effectively to ensure that the needs of its local population are reflected in key County-wide strategies. For example the County-wide Local Transport Plan clearly addresses the particular needs of Malvern Hills in tackling key issues of accessibility, congestion and environment in support of the County Council's own ambitions and priorities.

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

- 26 The Council uses consultation effectively to develop its understanding of local peoples needs. A major survey is undertaken every three years, supported by smaller scale surveys using its citizens' panel in the intervening years. Focus groups are also run to explore the results of the surveys. The original major survey undertaken in support of developing the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was used as the basis for updating the latest Sustainable Vision 21 Malvern Hills Community Strategy, supported by updated information from all partners. This approach ensures that the views of local people are routinely considered and inform decision making by the Council and its partners.
- 27 The Council is taking appropriate steps to further broaden its understanding of the needs of its local community. As a result of analysing public satisfaction, a community engagement strategy was launched in May 2007. The strategy identifies a range of good practice used in some parts of the Council and aims to spread the use of these corporately. It identifies a range of outcome measures in order to judge its effectiveness and is supported by a robust action plan. To further judge its effectiveness the Council is working with the Bulmer Foundation to facilitate MSc students to carry out a piece of work analysing the effectiveness of the Council's engagement with a diverse range of service users.
- 28 The Council's ambitions for its communities and for the place-shaping of the area are generally well understood and shared by partners. The Council is seen as an effective community leader and a strong champion of the area. However, some staff and partners are not able to articulate the Councils' ambitions clearly. This means that they are less able to understand their role in the Council's wider objectives.
- 29 The Chief Executive and Leader of the Council provide strong leadership within the region and sub region and ensure that Malvern Hills is well represented within the local government community. Councillors and officers play a key role within the Worcestershire LSP and are particularly active within the South Worcestershire partnership which involves Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon district councils, whose communities share similar characteristics and needs. For example the Council with its partners has been able to help meet the need for new homes in the area by allocating additional land for housing in Malvern to compensate for the lack of available space in Worcester, so meeting the need for affordable housing within the Malvern Hills area. The Council are clear what they want to achieve and are equally clear about what they cannot do, and act as effective champions across the region and for the region, so enhancing their opportunities to deliver their ambitions.
- 30 The Council works well with partners and plays a lead role in developing many partnerships. Of particular note is the leading role the Council took in developing the Worcestershire HUB, which has led to provision of integrated customer service centres throughout the county enabling Malvern Hills residents the opportunity to access a wide range of services at a single point.

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

31 The Council has a track record of adding value through partnership and shared services. For example the three statutory community safety partnerships in South Worcestershire - Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon - have merged to form a single South Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership. It has merged its revenues and benefits service with those of Wychavon and Worcester City Councils and is currently exploring joint working in the areas of business technology, environmental services and corporate support services such as human resources, performance and communications.

Prioritisation

32 The Council is performing well in this area. It has developed a new set of focused and pragmatic priorities which fit well with the community strategy. Priorities are underpinned by good implementation plans, with clear targets for improvement across a range of priorities. These targets support countywide plans but are not always sufficiently focused on outcomes. The Council is clear about areas which are not priorities for improvement. It has taken some important and difficult decisions on disinvestment in order to reinvest in priority areas.

33 The Council has developed a new set of robust and pragmatic priorities which address the needs of local people and reflect national, regional, county and local policy frameworks. Following the local elections in May 2007, the new administration agreed an interim set of priorities (see achievement section below) largely drawn from existing priorities at that time. In the autumn of 2007 cross-party consensus was gained on a new set of priorities based on discussions around national priorities, local need, demographic data, residents' views and regional and national strategies already in place. The priorities, which can be linked directly back to the LSP priorities and support the county-wide Local Area Agreement, are:

- economic prosperity;
- planning for the future - housing and regeneration;
- children and young people; and
- managing our waste for a better environment.

34 Priorities are supported by clear targets. Across the four priority areas, 19 targets are set to establish progress. Most, but not all, targets are explicit in that they detail absolute levels of improvement, such as half of all 5 to 16 year old participating in at least five hours of sport a week and 3,300 children and young people accessing free structured play by 2011. Many targets support plans adopted by partners, such as the county wide Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and the Local Area Agreement (LAA). Clear explicit targets, with milestones and dates by which to achieve the improvement means that the Council, partners and local people can see what the Council will deliver. However, not all targets have clear outcomes – some are actions and this reduces the clarity of what the Council hopes to achieve.

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

- 35** The Council is clear about what are not priorities for improvement. It can demonstrate a well-considered approach to disinvestment in non-priority areas such as community safety, transport and support for the arts. The Council has effectively communicated its decisions and reasoning and there is a general understanding within the Council and amongst partners with the rationale behind decisions generally accepted. For example the Council has been clear about how the relatively low levels of crime in the district have influenced its decision making in this area. It has changed its approach in the arts from delivering services to enabling others to do this, such as ongoing investment in town centre regeneration was reduced by involving and engaging with other stakeholders through High Street Great Malvern, supported by The Civic Trust and New Economics Foundation. This approach has enabled the Council to redirect resource away from its non-priority areas towards its priorities.
- 36** The Council is taking a clear and mature approach to considering options for service provision in order to better prioritise its own resources. For example it recently sold its Telecare operation to a consortium of Registered Social Landlords, because it required investment to improve but was not a priority. For arts support, the Council decided that previous investment had been sufficient to put a structure in place which would allow the long term survival of arts without ongoing council resourcing. In community safety, a post has been deleted but there is a support structure in place through the creation of a Streetscene team which will enable ongoing lower level liaison with the police.
- 37** The Council ensures that its priorities are central to Council business. Priorities are underpinned with cross-cutting plans and strategies and are supported by the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 38** The Council's approach to prioritisation is not sufficiently sensitive to ensure it takes into account the diverse nature of the district. It is unclear, for example, how priorities are consistently aligned towards specific geographical locations, age groups, ethnic groups, disability groups, or socio-economic groups. Whilst the Council can demonstrate in some areas, for example within its children and young people priority, that it takes some action to ensure inclusion of those in remote rural parts of the district and with special needs this is not consistent across all priority areas and is not well linked to outcomes. This means that the Council cannot be sure that it is targeting its work to achieve maximum impact.

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

Capacity

- 39 The Council is performing well in this area. It has robust decision-making arrangements and there are good officer-Councillor relationships. It has developed a strong culture of partnership working which has increased its capacity to deliver, competent resource management has resulted in good overall value for money. It is making steady progress in developing its workforce and, whilst sickness absence levels continue to remain high, appropriate steps are being taken to address the issue. There are good plans to improve the Council's approach to diversity but, currently, the Council cannot assure itself that there is no unintentional inequality in service provision.
- 40 Leadership at the Council, both from officers and Councillors, is good. General direction for the Council is set by senior Councillors, with officer support, and political accountability and decision-making is transparent and clear. Operational decisions are taken by a senior management team, which works corporately with no evidence of silo working. Good political and officer arrangements have helped the Council in securing improvements in key areas such as recycling and shared services.
- 41 Joint working between officers and Councillors is good. Examples of this include open discussion of performance issues at the quarterly performance forum and a number of working boards dealing with such issues as business technology, equalities and diversity, efficiencies and property. The impact of this approach is demonstrated in the good joint community leadership in reacting effectively to the 2007 summer floods which affected residents and businesses throughout the district.
- 42 Risks are well managed. The roles and responsibilities of officers and Councillors in monitoring risk are clear, and decisions are informed by good analysis of risk. Risk management is included in executive committee reports, which contain a scored risk assessment for Councillors to consider. These processes help the Council to manage the delivery of its priorities.

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

- 43 The Council works well within its ethical framework. Councillors work well together, showing respect to each other and Council officers; there have been no significant referrals for investigation. Appropriate arrangements are in place including a standards committee with an independent chair – which meets four times a year to consider the register of interest, but otherwise has no formal work programme; a Members Code of Conduct and a number of protocols dealing with gifts, hospitality and whistle blowing. An effective framework helps Councillors and officers work well together.
- 44 Overview and Scrutiny is adequate. The leader of the opposition chairs Overview and Scrutiny. Processes are developing well with good officer support, and it is beginning to have a positive impact on Council business. Examples of reviews which have some impact include work on the medium term financial strategy and a review of the Council's response to the 2007 floods. This latter review resulted in an increase in the amount of resources allocated for land drainage. The role of overview and scrutiny is not well understood more widely since, whilst there is an overview and scrutiny workplan, the content and purpose of this is not well known both within the Council and among key stakeholders.
- 45 The Council has successfully increased its capacity through partnership working. Good examples include the setting up of the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits shared service and working on the development of the Core Strategy with Worcester City Council and Wychavon District Council. Operational examples include a number of joint initiatives with the Police and the local social landlord designed to reduce anti-social behaviour. Working with partners ensures efficiency of resilience of local services.
- 46 The Council also works well with the district Local Strategic Partnership and the voluntary and community sector. Examples include working with High Street Malvern, a community led body, to help regenerate the town centre, working with the Borrowers toy library to increase the provision of play activities and the development of specific projects with the LSP around rural regeneration and worklessness. However, despite these individual examples, the Council has not developed an overall approach to maximising capacity in the district with key stakeholders, which has limited the impact the Council has made.
- 47 The Council's financial capacity is good. It continues to improve the way it uses its resources. It has a sufficient level of reserves, maintains a balanced budget and has good plans in place to deliver efficiencies over the next two years. These plans include changes in front line services like street cleaning, pest control and building control, postal service savings and the disposal of some assets. In the medium term financial plan the Council allocates revenue and capital budgets in line with priorities. Good financial arrangements support the Council in achieving its priorities.
- 48 The Council provides good value for money for local residents in delivering its key services. Overall costs compare well with other councils, Council tax levels are below average and spending on services per head of population is in the lower quartile. Part of the Council's success in this area has been due to a culture at the Council of seeking to reduce its own investment in projects and services whilst maximising investment from external partners.

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

- 49 The Council is increasing staff capacity. Investment supports the Council's priorities. Having previously focused mainly on the transactional side of HR, the Council is now developing its approach to workforce planning, ensuring that it has the right people with the right skills to deliver improvements to local people. A key project in this area is the development of a competency framework in conjunction with Worcester City Council. There is also a programme for managers with aims around motivation, coaching, team meeting skills, communication skills and managing outcomes and a further set of aims to develop the interpersonal and personal effectiveness skills of employees. Effective communication, including staff newsletters and clear responses to the annual staff surveys, have enabled bullying to be tackled and improved learning opportunities for managers. However, sickness absence remains high, at 11.1 days (per person) although short term sickness is improving through intervention and monitoring. Investment in training and development is having a positive effect by enhancing the skills of both individuals and the overall capacity of the Council.
- 50 The Council has been slow to implement Local Pay and Grading. The process started in December 2005 and concluded in draft proposals in the spring of 2007. Following the change of administration and subsequent financial modelling it was realised that the job evaluation scores might be out of date, therefore a decision was made in March 2008 to allow staff to comment on their original evaluation. The Council acknowledges that, as a result of these delays, a degree of frustration among staff is possible.
- 51 The Council's approach to developing the capacity of its Councillors is good. Following a high number of newly elected Councillors in the May 2007 election, the Council put in place a strong induction programme which included briefings on development control, equality and diversity, the ethical framework, finances, community leadership, overview and scrutiny and performance management. Following this initial programme, the approach has been less corporate and focussed more on discussions within the political groups, with no decision being made yet on whether the Council should seek accreditation with its members programme. The Council is aware that further delay in developing its corporate approach will have an adverse impact on member development as a whole within the Council.

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

- 52 The Council has a sound overall approach to developing diversity and equality issues, but this has not yet led to these issues being mainstreamed and embedded within the workforce. Despite good plans being developed in conjunction with the County Council, the Council has not yet managed to achieve higher than level 2 of the equality standard. The Council also has plans in place to carry out its programme of equality impact assessments but these have yet to have any impact on either staff or users. The appointment of a Councillor champion for diversity and equality is a positive move but, as with the broader issue, this move has not yet had the desired impact within the Council.

Performance management

- 53 The Council is performing well in this area. Performance management has been effective in contributing to considerable improvement across many service areas. The Council has a good approach to monitoring performance and performance data is used well to improve services. Individual performance management is well established with clear links between managers and specific targets, but these links are not fully developed throughout the organisation. There is a good approach to managing value for money and integrating resources and performance data, but insufficient links between diversity and performance. The use of performance data to report against priorities is improving. The Council has a positive approach to external challenge, whether this comes from inspection, audit or its own users.
- 54 The Council has a good process for collecting and monitoring performance data. It uses a software package which it has tailored well to enable monitoring to take place against the new Council priorities, with performance indicators linked to priorities and management plan actions. In addition, the system allows monitoring of all management plans, and of individual managers' targets. As part of the adaptations, the Council has ensured that the layout of the system is clear and accessible and, as a consequence, it is used well. Executive Councillors meet their respective head of service monthly and the data from the performance management system is used as the basis for a discussion about progress against management plans and performance indicators. In addition, managers use the functionality of the system to identify individual staff responsibilities and then to monitor progress against targets on a regular basis. These arrangements enable the Council to keep track of progress in key service areas.
- 55 The Council uses performance information to improve performance in some areas. Good examples of this are improvements in the planning service and the range of indicators assessing the Council's progress in waste and recycling. In planning, the Council acted to significantly improve when it recognised that the speed of determining planning applications was amongst the poorest performing in the country; as a result, the 2007/08 targets were exceeded. Similarly, in waste and recycling, the Council has used data to drive service improvements, resulting in better services and outcomes for local people, and better comparative performance.

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

- 56 The Council monitors and reports performance against most of its service standards. The majority of these standards are collected and monitored on the performance management system but others are monitored separately by managers. This inconsistency in monitoring and reporting arrangements means that, in a small number of areas, it is not possible for users or other stakeholders to see clearly how well the Council is doing, but otherwise, performance is clearly published.
- 57 The Council has a good approach to managing value for money and integrating resources into its performance management framework. The Council is aware of the general low level of costs it has and the generally high level of performance so is able to demonstrate value for money in general terms. Information on the ratio of cost to performance for specific services is available in some areas, but this is not produced consistently across all priority areas. This means that, although the Council is able to use data to reallocate resources in some key areas, this is not possible across all of its priorities.
- 58 Performance management arrangements across partnership activity is generally good. The Council has helped to develop performance management for its key partnerships with the result that, for example, there are strong arrangements for managing the performance of contractors such as Wychavon Leisure and Festival Housing. The arrangements for managing the performance of the LSP against the Sustainable Community Strategy priorities are less well developed, but the Council is working well with its LSP partners to design processes that will assess progress against a series of projects agreed by the LSP board. Such arrangements will enable local people to be clear about the added value of the LSP in improving their quality of life.
- 59 The management of individual performance is generally good. At a senior and middle manager level individual accountability is clear, enabling individual performance to be monitored effectively. The Council's Performance, Review and Development (PR&D) system works well with regular discussions around performance, although links to Council priorities and front line services are not as clear as for managers. Never the less, the good overall approach to managing individual performance means that the Council can be confident that individual staff are working to deliver clear priorities.
- 60 The Council's approach to integrating diversity with performance management is still developing. Some information on relative satisfaction levels with some services is collected and analysed based on where people live, or their age or ethnicity, and data on how leisure facilities are used is assessed; but, in general, targets are district wide and do not consider how performance in one geographic area but impact on other areas, or whether services are accessible to all sections of the community.
- 61 The Council has a good approach to collecting and learning from complaints, compliments and comments. As part of the developing HUB arrangements with its County-wide partners, the Council collects, monitors and reports customer feedback using its Customer Relations Management (CRM) system. It advertises the process for making complaints, comments and compliments on the Council's website and in the HUBs. Numbers of complaints, comments and compliments are monitored and discussed by the Council's senior management team. These processes enable the Council to change policies and procedures to take account of customer views.

What has been achieved?

Achievement and improvement

- 62** The Council is performing well in this area. It has achieved considerable improvement in services over the past three years and, although there was some slowing of improvement in 2006/07, unaudited figures for 2007/08 show further strong improvement. Resident satisfaction with services is good and improving in many areas but is less positive about the Council as a whole. The Council is carrying out appropriate activities to support its priority areas but an inconsistent approach to evidencing measurement of outcomes means that it is not always possible to identify positive outcomes across all priority areas at this stage.
- 63** Overall the Council has improved services considerably in the last three years and its performance compares well with other similar councils. Comparison with other district Councils shows above average improvement over a three-year period. An above average percentage of services are achieving performance equivalent to the best performing district Councils. Performance is good in waste collection and recycling and resident satisfaction is high. Good progress has been made in improving street scene services whilst investment in affordable housing is starting to deliver tangible results. Local transport services have improved and the Council is taking action to promote community health and well being. Although the rate of improvement slowed in 2006/07, unaudited figures for 2007/08 indicate strong improvement, with 86 per cent of performance indicators improving during that year.
- 64** Resident satisfaction with services is good and improving. The majority of services show improvement in resident satisfaction. Satisfaction levels with almost all services are above average when compared nationally. Overall satisfaction with the Council fell by 7 per cent compared with 2003/04, although this still remains above average. Deterioration with overall satisfaction reflects a national decline but can also be linked to a locally contentious issue, a decision to close public conveniences, at the time of the survey which has since been reversed.
- 65** Achievements against the Council's five priorities (the interim priorities agreed when the new administration was elected in May 2007) are outlined below.

Local homes for local people

- 66** The Council is achieving positive outcomes in delivering affordable housing and in preventing homelessness.

What has been achieved?

- 67 The Council's proactive approach locally, regionally and sub-regionally has led to improved outcomes and assurance that levels of future housing need will be addressed. Locally, the Local Plan Affordable Housing Policy has led to planning permission for 111 affordable houses being granted in the first nine months of 2007/08, against a target of enabling 30 affordable homes to be built annually. Regionally and sub-regionally the Council has played a key role in establishing the South Housing Market Area Partnership, consisting of all the districts in Worcestershire and the districts of Stratford on Avon and Warwick, which has enabled a cross boundary analysis of housing needs. Needs assessments for South Worcestershire only and for Malvern Hills District Council only have also been established. Such an approach gives assurance that appropriate detailed affordable housing targets meeting the needs of local communities can be established.
- 68 The Council works well with a range of partners to secure affordable housing and associated community facilities. For example, through negotiation with the developers of the North Site development provision has been made for 210 new affordable houses (equivalent to 43 per cent affordable units), and a further 20 subsidised homes for sale secured through the English Partnerships First Time Buyers Initiative. Negotiation has also secured a primary school, employment land, a community building, recreation areas, a recycling centre, and cycle routes on the development. Similarly, opportunities for redevelopment on the Council's former depot site have been used imaginatively to develop a new Health Centre with plans agreed to build a new Sure Start centre and 50 new two-bedroom flats, all of which are affordable, through a local Registered Social Landlord.
- 69 The Council works well with its partners to prevent homelessness. Through accessing schemes such as Homebuy and rent deposit guarantee schemes it has enabled 90 families to access affordable housing in the last year. Three hundred and fifty families were kept out of homelessness in the last year and performance indicators for homelessness applications that are repeat applications, average length of stay in hostel accommodation, and time taken to process housing benefit applications are good.

Reducing our impact on the environment

- 70 The Council can demonstrate strong performance on waste minimisation and improvements in recycling but in targets related to climate change, which made up 8 out of 11 plans within the priority, limited progress has been made.
- 71 The Council is showing strong and improving performance across most areas on waste minimisation and recycling. It is amongst the top performers in the country for resident satisfaction with recycling, resident satisfaction with waste collection, percentage of the population served by kerbside recycling, and reducing the amount of household waste collected. With the exception of satisfaction with waste collection, all of these indicators are continuing to improve. The Council is taking appropriate steps to increase participation in recycling through general education, 100 per cent coverage of kerbside collection, provision of appropriate recycling facilities and schools recycling. At around 26 per cent, however, the percentage of household waste recycled is below average and although it is continuing to improve, the Council's own unaudited figures show that it failed to reach its target for 2007/08.

72 Progress is starting to be made in the broader approach to environmental sustainability. The Council has used its planning powers to ensure high standards of energy efficiency and sustainability on new developments, such as the large North Site development which incorporates imaginative approaches to energy efficiency and recycling. It also has plans to reduce the level of its own carbon emissions, such as through introduction of home working for staff, but these ideas are not yet strategically planned, and without this strategic plan it is unlikely to maximise its contribution to reducing its own carbon footprint.

Improving access to quality spaces

73 Resident satisfaction in many areas relating to this priority is good and improving and the Council is putting the right building blocks in place to continue this strong performance. The Council dealt well with the emergency situation of flooding across the district in July 2007, its positive role recognised by residents and partners alike.

74 Resident satisfaction with parks and open spaces, cleanliness of public space, and with theatres and concert halls is amongst the highest in the country and the Council continues to maintain or improve these levels of satisfaction. The Council is also amongst the best performers in keeping the area clean.

75 The Council has worked well with partners to put in place the right building blocks to continue to improve access to quality spaces. For example, it has secured funding of £40,000 together with the support of the Civic Trust and New Economics Foundation to establish the High Street Malvern community-led town centre regeneration body. This is an independent company which will be the vehicle to deliver a range of development projects from infrastructure projects through to promotional events. These include a heritage lottery bid for a strategic open space in the district, exploration of shared space principles to improve the built environment of the town centre and work with a major European hotel chain to boost tourism in the town centre.

What has been achieved?

76 The Council worked effectively to respond to the emergency situation of flooding across the district in the summer of 2007. Severe flooding occurred in Tenbury Wells in June 2006 which was then compounded by flash flooding across the district in July 2007 leaving 43 of the Council's 51 parishes affected by the worst river and flash flooding experienced in the county for 100 years. Eight hundred households and 600 businesses were affected, with many having to leave their property for several months. As well as establishing rest centres across the district to help those made homeless and travellers affected by road closures, and the subsequent clean up operation the Council secured and administered £380,000 of CLG and Red Cross flood relief funding. Local steering groups, each allocated £80,000 funding, were established in Tenbury and Upton which ensured the development of projects supported and requested by the local resident and business community. Both Upton and Tenbury benefited from a number of enhancements to public open spaces recognised by local people. Across the district more than 180 businesses have received Business Restart grants, and more than 650 households received grants ranging from £200 to £3,000 to help them recover from flood damage.

Supporting children and young people

- 77** Outcomes for children and young people in Malvern Hills are unclear. The Council undertakes a number of activities to support this priority and many of these are outlined below. It is not clear, however, what the effects of these activities are for local children as the Council's view is that their contribution feeds into the county-wide indicators which do not appear to be disaggregated to a district level.
- 78** The Council carries out a range of activities in order to achieve the objectives of the five main strands of the county wide Children and Young Peoples Plan – namely that children and young people are healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and benefit from economic well-being. For example, activities which clearly support a number of these objectives include development of a community sports network and sports coaches across the district, offer of free or subsidised access to Malvern Splash for gifted sports people, through to improved sports facilities at Sport Marley and Dyson Perrin school and improving sporting activities and coaching available in the Tenbury area of the district. Without measurement of outcomes locally the Council cannot be sure that it is having the expected effect on the lives of local children and young peoples.

Rural regeneration

- 79** Since the floods faced by the district in June and July 2007 coincided with the decision to adopt rural regeneration as a priority, the Council's focus on rural regeneration has necessarily been on economic regeneration linked to the floods, the detail of which is outlined above in the section 'Improving Access to Quality Spaces'.

- 80** In addition to its important work in response to the floods, the Council has contributed to other outcomes in terms of rural regeneration. For example, 46 affordable homes have been delivered on rural sites over the last two years, and the Council has used its planning powers in negotiations with local Registered Social landlords to ensure that the design of new build homes in rural areas complements existing homes in the area. The Council has also developed and promoted the new Redundant Building Grant through the Rural Regeneration Zone. This is a grant designed to bring old farm buildings back into use and grant funding has been secured for two businesses in the first three months of its operation. The grant scheme has now been extended to areas of Shropshire and Warwickshire facing similar rural issues.
- 81** The Council's wider district regeneration projects also support its rural regeneration priority. The district is at the southernmost point of the Central Technology Belt and has ensured focus on the Malvern Science Park. This investment has paid off in terms of increased employment and the presence of international companies, such as QinetiQ which employs 2,400 people as well as 16 other technology based companies. Phase three of the development, due for completion at the end of the year, will provide a further 180 jobs. In addition the Council has worked with the site owner and Advantage West Midlands to agree a funding package to develop the Blackmore Business Park which has planning permission for 275,000 sq ft of mixed used business space. There is a shortfall of good quality employment land in the district and this site will offer land to cater for expansion of local businesses and those looking to relocate.

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 Malvern Hills District Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 19 May 2008 to 23 May 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.

The Audit Commission

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

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