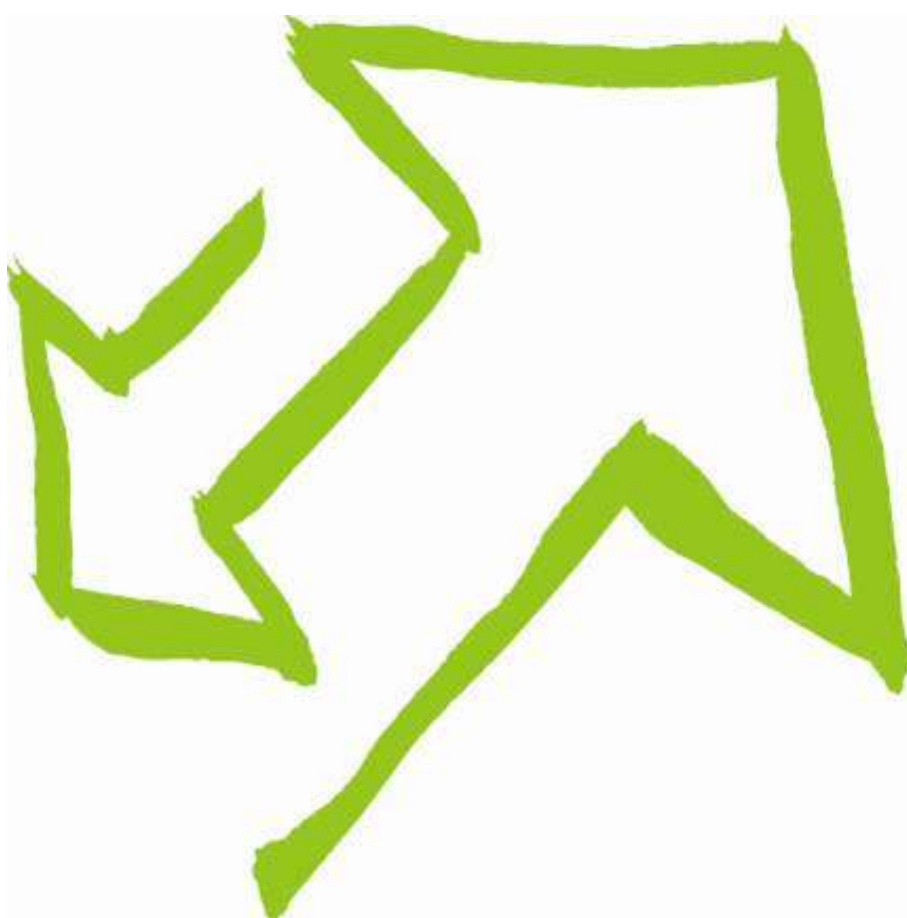


Corporate Assessment

East Lindsey District Council
February 2009



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Introduction

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

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

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement

Considered against the ambitions outlined in the Council's corporate strategy:

- to improve economic prosperity;
- to nurture our distinctive vibrant communities;
- to reduce inequality to improve the quality of life;
- to put residents at the heart of all we do;
- to be green, open and ethical; and
- to be an aspirational high performing council.

Executive summary

- 3 East Lindsey District Council has made good progress, improving front line services and improving the efficiency of its own operations. In 2003 the Council was weak; it is now a 'good' council.
- 4 The Council is improving rapidly in many areas. Some services, and some ways the Council works, are amongst the best in the country; such as the proportion of household waste it sends for recycling and composting. The integration of service and financial planning has improved the efficiency of services, helped improve value for money, and enabled extra resources to be invested in priority services. However, in common with many organisations that are improving rapidly, some processes and systems have yet to deliver the level of service required or expected. Sickness absence remains high, some key policies lack overarching strategies and, significantly, the Council's communications do not fully take into account the needs and expectations of the distinctive communities the Council seeks to nurture.
- 5 Services delivered by the Council are generally good and have improved faster than most councils. Recycling has gone from being one of the poorer services to achieving the highest recycling rate in England for 2007/08; the speed of processing benefits claims has increased, helping those who are vulnerable when they most need help; good use of information technology means that people can access services through the website, local customer access points, over the phone and, when needed, home visits are made. Publications, such as leaflets, forms and the Council's own magazine, are available in a variety of formats.
- 6 The Council's ambitions are clear, challenging and understood by councillors, staff and partners. These include ambitions to improve the district, increase prosperity and reduce inequalities, and improve the way the Council works. The Council's ambitions have been developed taking into account local need and balancing these where they conflict with each other. They reflect regional and national priorities, and take into account constraints, such as the lack of development land available along the coast because of the risk of flooding.
- 7 The Council's priorities support the overall ambitions. There are 23 priorities - areas that the Council will work on, in order to achieve its ambitions and tackle some specific localised issues. These have been well resourced, with finances identified through improved efficiencies and by integrating financial and service planning; a total of £1.4 million extra money has been invested in these priorities. And the Council has a good track record of delivering on its priorities because it monitors and manages progress, although some important strategies do not have an overarching action plan.
- 8 The Council has not successfully communicated its priorities to local people or to partners. Whilst the Council works well with partners to implement priorities, such as working with the PCT on a whole range of initiatives, it has failed to take in to account the needs of local communities when promoting actions, leading to some dissatisfaction with the Council. Nor has the Council taken decisive action over services it has identified as a low priority.

Executive summary

- 9 The Council is improving how it works. Since the last assessment, systems have improved for both planning what it will do, and how it will deliver this. The Council now provides good Value for Money (VfM) and has good arrangements to continue to improve VfM. The leaders of the Council are visible and their approach is appreciated by most partners. Training of both staff and councillors has improved the skills and knowledge available to the Council, although the Council is not yet making full use of councillor capacity. Plans for scrutiny do not fully link to the plans for the Executive, Scrutiny decisions are not always acted on by the Executive and some training sessions are not well attended.
- 10 Services are improving. The Council plans for, and delivers, improvement by using clear reports to managers and councillors. It has started to listen to what matters to local people and will change what it does in response - such as the improvements at Fairy Dell in Skegness, and changes to the collection dates for the new recycling arrangements. But there remains room for improvement - both in terms of setting targets and for managing complex improvements delivered across the Council and with partners.

Areas for improvement

- 11 The Council has successfully improved many processes and is delivering a range of good services across the district. However, satisfaction remains low in many areas. Whilst many partners appreciate the work of the Council, some work is restricted by a lack of understanding and cooperation. This is due to a combination of poor previous relationships and ineffective communication. The Council should deal with this issue urgently as it restricts its ability to deliver improvements and is hindering the development of some communities; it reduces the capacity the Council has to deliver services and improvements. Specifically, the Council should consider.
- Improving communication and strengthening partnerships with town and parish councils. The Council should apply its knowledge and understanding of local communities, their needs, aspirations and expectations, and use this to help ensure that these relationships mature in to effective partnerships. In particular, the Council should concentrate on communicating what is relevant to each partner rather than expecting community based partnerships to understand and appreciate district wide issues.
 - Targeted internal communication that is relevant to the services and level. This should help ensure that front line staff understand how their work contributes to the overall ambitions the Council has for both itself and the district.
- 12 The Council has done well to improve the available capacity and ensure that both finances and staff time is directed in to priority areas. But the Council is not making the most of the available capacity and it should consider the following.
- Improving the arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny to ensure that the links between the work plans of Scrutiny and the Executive are clear, and streamlining the overview function so that important policy decisions are not delayed when considered.
 - Reviewing its approach to strategic projects and partnerships. In particular, it should:
 - strengthen its Organisational Development strategy, by combining existing actions into an overarching delivery plan; and
 - improve performance management in partnerships. Although arrangements are adequate for now, they are not sufficient to manage performance in the complex partnerships that are being developed for future improvements.

Summary of assessment scores

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

Context

The locality

- 13** East Lindsey is a large, rural and sparsely populated district on the east coast of Lincolnshire, south of the Humber, and in the East Midlands. It covers 1,760 square km, making it the third largest English district council (by area), and larger than many English counties. Its population of 140,100 (mid 2007 estimate) is spread across 189 diverse parishes; the two largest towns are Skegness (19,000) and Louth (16,000). The population is increasing faster than average and has risen by over 17 per cent since the 1991 census.
- 14** Tourism and, to a lesser extent, agriculture are the main industries in the area. Skegness is the fifth largest seaside resort in England and the population along the coast increases from 60,000 to 240,000 during the summer tourist season. Otherwise, much of the district is rural in nature and sparsely populated with an average density of less than 80 people per square km, approximately one fifth of the national average. House prices are relatively low; in March 2008, the average house price in East Lindsey was £157,891, well below the national average of £218,573.
- 15** The district is the 88th most deprived in England, with six areas falling into the most deprived 10 per cent of the country. All these areas are on the east coast of the district. Although other parts of the district are more affluent, no part of the district is in the 10 per cent least deprived in England. Gross weekly pay in the district is lower than the regional and national average; for 2007, the average weekly wage for somebody living in the district was £383 compared to a regional average of £429 and a national average of £459.
- 16** The district has an aging population. Overall, the district has fewer children in poverty, less statutory homelessness, fewer adults that smoke and more physically active children than the national average. Alcohol related crimes and alcohol related hospital admissions are significantly lower than the national average. However, the incidence of obese adults and diabetes is higher than the national average. Life expectancy at birth is in line with the regional and national averages. For females in East Lindsey life expectancy is 81.5 years; for males it is 77.3 years.
- 17** There is a high White British population in the district at 97.7 per cent compared to 87 per cent in England; the highest other ethnic group is White Other at 0.8 per cent. Migrant workers are linked to seasonal activities including tourism along the coast and agriculture further inland.

The Council

- 18 East Lindsey District Council comprises 60 councillors; 27 are Conservative, 19 East Lindsey Independent Group, 8 Labour; 3 Liberal Democrat, 2 Independent Group and one independent. The Council operates the Leader and Executive model. The Executive Board, which meets every six weeks, is made up of ten councillors, from both the Conservative and East Lindsey Independent Group. Overview and scrutiny is provided by an Overview Committee and two Scrutiny Committees, A and B. In addition there is an Audit Committee plus Appointment, Employment, General Licences, Planning and Planning Policy Committees and a Standards Committee.
- 19 The Council's net revenue budget for 2008/09 is £23 million. The Council's capital programme commits the Council to £27 million expenditure up to 2011. For a Band D property, the district council portion of the Council Tax for 2008/09 is £107.01 (the lowest in the East Midlands), an increase of 4.9 per cent over 2007/08.
- 20 The Council employs 800 permanent staff. The staff are led by the Chief Executive, who is supported by two Strategic Directors, two Assistant Directors (although one post is currently vacant) and an Assistant Chief Executive; together these form the corporate management team (CMT). Twelve business managers report to CMT.
- 21 The Council's Corporate Strategy sets the overall ambition for the Council, *A District with healthy, prosperous, vibrant people and places*, which is supported by six ambitions.

Ambitions for East Lindsey

- To improve economic prosperity – in order to make a significant improvement to the economic prosperity of the District.
- To nurture our distinctive vibrant communities – to make sure that everyone can be fully involved in their communities.
- To reduce inequality to improve quality of life – to make sure every resident has an equal opportunity to have a good quality of life.

Ambitions for the Council and the Community

- To put residents at the heart of all we do – listening and learning from our customers.
- To be green, open and ethical – manage resources in an environmentally sound manner.
- To be an aspirational, high performing Council – share service delivery with partners and to be recognised as a Council striving for excellence.

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

Ambition

- 22 The Council performs well in this area, consistently above minimum requirements. The Council has a good understanding of the diverse and varied needs of the district. This is based on consultation and analysis of local data. Challenging ambitions take into account local and national priorities, and balance conflicting priorities for the diverse communities across the district. Ambitions are clear and well understood by councillors, staff and partners, and clear leadership is provided by the Council working effectively with most partners.
- 23 The Council has clear and challenging ambitions. The vision for the district, *a District with healthy, prosperous, vibrant people and places*, is consistent with the aspirations the Council has to improve itself and its services, and takes account of the very diverse needs and aspirations of local communities across the district. The ambitions expand on the vision, building on the existing strengths of the district, such as the distinctive communities, and address the challenges that lay ahead for the district, such as improving economic prosperity and reducing inequality. They recognise and address the scale of the challenge, including the decline in the district economy (which is based on short seasonal employment), and that prosperity is lower than the regional average. At the same time, the ambitions seek to address existing inequalities, such as the higher than average levels of deprivation across the district and specifically the issues of multiple deprivation (poor housing, poor health and limited access to services) in some areas and the wide variation in life chances across the district. The ambitions also recognise the need for the Council to continue to improve its own internal processes, such as putting residents at the heart of what they do. 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.
- 24 The Council has responded effectively to constraints imposed on the district - and this is reflected in its ambitions. Much of the coastal area, where there is a recognised need for regeneration, is at risk of flooding if sea levels rise; this imposes severe restrictions on new development. However, the Council's aims remain clear and ambitious. There are good plans for development within permitted areas. It is also an effective advocate for the district, lobbying central government and working constructively with the Environment Agency and the Government Office East Midlands, over these constraints. The Council's ambitions also commit itself to minimise and mitigate against the impact of climate change. This leadership is ensuring that ambitions respond to need and are not limited by external factors.

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

- 25** Councillors, staff and partners are clear about the Council's ambitions - the Council has communicated these effectively. Senior councillors and managers are visible and consistent in what they promote as important for the Council; partners recognise what the Council's ambitions are and appreciate both the clarity and quality of presentation. Clear outcomes have been identified to support the overall vision, whilst ambition plans and delivery plans provide detail of short term expected outcomes. This is supported by a good consensus between councillors from different political groups about the Council's ambitions and what this means to the district. This is particularly relevant because the diverse needs of differing communities remains a source of conflict.
- 26** The Council works effectively with partners to provide leadership for the district. LSP (Local Strategic Partnership) partners work well together, achieving good outcomes, such as turning a range of unfit housing, in Mablethorpe, into a range of community activities and improving services for older people through the First Contact initiative. The Council has provided good leadership to help in county wide initiatives, for example, in helping negotiate a countywide approach to the new concessionary travel scheme. And although the LSP has not always been effective, the Council has recognised and is addressing this. The refreshed Community Strategy was based on good consultation with local people and research into local issues. This shows that the Council works well with a range of partners to deliver ambitions that improve the district.
- 27** Ambitions are based on a clear understanding of the needs and aspirations of the local communities and the district as a whole. Biannual surveys compare the state of the district with the rest of the country. Good arrangements are in place for community engagement; Area committees are working well in some areas, with good attendance from public and parish councils, but other areas have poor attendance, especially from the parish and town councils. The Neighbourhood Management pilot is helping address this and is showing good outcomes; local people appreciate the improvements delivered, and the Council has clear plans to extend this. Consultation with local communities was integrated to refresh the Community Strategy and to inform the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. A clear understanding of the needs and aspirations of the district is important to inform challenging yet meaningful ambitions.

Prioritisation

- 28** The Council performs adequately in this area. Local needs are taken into account when setting priorities and considering strategic targets; resources are directed into these areas effectively through the revised service and financial plans, and priorities support the ambitions of the Council. However, the Council has not successfully communicated its priorities to partners or local people, and has yet to take action over areas it has identified as low priorities.

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

- 29** Priorities support the overall ambitions for the area and are clearly linked to the Council's ambitions. The Corporate Strategy contains 23 priorities, reflecting the pragmatic way that the Council is managing local issues. Priorities include improving and broadening the tourist experience, improved access to services and reducing the impact of financial inequalities; each is linked to the overall ambitions for the Council, and supported by short term outcomes, entitled 'What we want to achieve', a list of actions the Council will deliver (called 'We will'), and some longer term outcomes that local people will notice. Some priorities address the needs of certain communities or geographic areas of the district and to address the needs of disadvantaged communities, such as reducing health inequalities. Each priority seeks a significant improvement compared to the existing situation, although not all are explicit. Actions to deliver priorities are included in Service and Financial Plans - one for each business area, which also identify other actions that support overall ambitions. Service and Financial Plans include explicit targets and milestones that are relevant to the service. Overall, it is clear how the priorities support the ambitions. This means that local people can be confident that delivering priorities will help meet its ambitions.
- 30** The Council is improving internal processes and, as a result, arrangements to deliver priorities are adequate overall, but are not consistent across the Council. The Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan is reviewed every six months, based on actions completed and outcomes achieved, although the lack of clear explicit outcomes reduces the efficiency of this process. Some priorities are supported by clear strategies which often include ambitious plans for improvement. These have been successful in the past, such as achieving a threefold increase in recycling by introducing new waste management collections. And the integration of service and financial planning has already enabled over £2 million efficiency savings to be identified, and continues to be used to ensure that resources support priority areas - over £1.4 million was directed into priority areas last year, and the same process is being used in the setting of the next budget. But the ambitious People and Organisational Development Strategy, that is seeking large improvements in performance, lacks a robust delivery plan, relying on the Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan and individual Service and Financial Plans to ensure that the actions are completed. Good plans and strategies to support priorities help ensure that plans are delivered, but major plans without clear delivery plans hamper management and reduce the assurance that the strategy will be fully implemented.
- 31** Targeted action responds to need and addresses local concerns. For example, the Council has worked with the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) to help reduce the incidence of poor health through poor diet, which was especially prevalent along the coast. Practical cooking demonstrations are held in village halls, youth and children's centres and supermarkets, with fresh fruit and vegetables available at subsidised rates to encourage people to create nutritious meals on a budget. This was supported by a range of fitness equipment in village halls (known as 'virtual gyms'), used by over 700 people in Mablethorpe in its first year. The Council also responded effectively to severe flooding in summer 2007, both in terms of its immediate response and adjusting priorities to support families affected by the flooding. Extra staff were made available to support vulnerable people, and the Council adopted a medium term priority to reduce the risk of flooding in the future, and to be prepared in the event of flooding. Responding to local and changing needs is important in order to support local people.

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

- 32** Whilst the Council is good at taking action to support local communities, it has not been consistently effective at communicating with local people. The Council publishes a very good newsletter, which is sent to every home in the district. Each issue is produced with the local Police and edited by a local group who pick the focus for that issue - such as support for older people or activities for younger people. Along with many other Council publications, it is available in a range of alternative formats and languages including Portuguese, and eastern European languages - in response to an increased number of migrant workers. These newsletters are well received. The Council has also been successful at communicating relevant changes to services, such as the refuse and recycling changes.
- 33** However, communication of local initiatives in the different parts of the district has not been successful. Rather unusually, although the Council has recognised the wide ranging and diverse needs of the differing communities in the district, and has balanced both ambitions and priorities effectively across these diverse needs, its communication has not always recognised this. Public communication focuses on what the Council is doing for the district as a whole, rather than what it is doing for the different towns and communities in East Lindsey. This is particularly relevant in regeneration, where the regeneration needs of differing parts of the district vary significantly, and what is proposed in one area may appear to be in direct conflict with another area. This failure to communicate effectively has led to dissatisfaction with the Council and a lack of understanding about how delivering priorities will help local communities. Inevitably, it then impacts on available resources as councillors and staff respond to criticisms rather than delivering priorities.
- 34** Whilst the Council has delivered improved services in line with priorities, and clearly directed resources from efficiency savings into priority areas, it has yet to make significant changes to low priority services. It has identified public toilets in non-tourist areas as a low priority, but has yet to resolve what this will mean for individual towns and villages. Most toilets remain open whilst the Council seeks a consensus of opinion across diverse communities. Whilst there are a few successful examples of changing low priority services, most areas are not progressing effectively. The Council recognises that delivery of its ambitious programme of improvement will require some difficult decisions. But it has not yet tested its resolve to implement these despite the Medium Term Financial Strategy demonstrating that maintaining current service levels and delivering the 23 priorities is not affordable in the future. Until the Council takes robust action over low priority areas, it can not be confident that it will be able to deliver on all its priorities.

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

Capacity

- 35 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Since the last corporate assessment, the Council has successfully improved and developed necessary capacity. For example, the Council has revised the management arrangements and it has invested in skills development for both officers and councillors. Political leadership has also improved and a new corporate strategy introduced. Councillors, staff and partners have noticed and welcomed these improvements, although the Council still needs to ensure that councillors' time and resources are used consistently to help the Council; in particular, Scrutiny is not fully effective.
- 36 Management and political leadership are clear and visible. Councillors understand their role in leading the Council and have an ownership of the corporate priorities. Councillors are actively involved in performance and financial planning, such as the cross party Joint Administration Group which reviews budget proposals at an early stage and offers comments as appropriate. The Chief Executive and senior management team give leadership and direction to staff. Two new strategic directors have recently been appointed, bringing additional skills into the Council. Clear leadership and well defined roles means that the Council can use councillor and staff capacity effectively.
- 37 The Council has a positive approach to councillor development, but implementation has been inconsistent. In June 2008, East Lindsey achieved the East Midlands Member Development Charter. Councillors have access to a regular review of learning needs by both role and personal requirements. Councillor development is supported by well structured arrangements, including a systematic identification of training needs, a varied training programme linked to corporate priorities and personal development plans. Those councillors who have participated recognise that they are better able to undertake their roles. But implementation of development plans has been slow, with some councillors reluctant to participate; almost half of councillors have not undertaken equalities and diversity training. Some backbench councillors are struggling to balance local ward issues and issues that affect the whole district. Overall, councillors are better able to serve the Council and the area, but the Council is not yet making full use of the resources it has available and the training is not yet fully effective.

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

- 38** Staff have the appropriate skills to deliver the Corporate Strategy. Improved management arrangements have helped to streamline decision-making and accountability. In particular:
- staff are encouraged to take part in improvement planning, and have been moved from non-priority areas to those in need of improvement, such as to extend the neighbourhood management areas;
 - the management competency framework links to skills required to deliver the Corporate Strategy. Priorities for training are linked to delivering the corporate strategy;
 - although staff morale appears low, the last survey was in 2007 when uncertainty remained around job evaluation, single status and restructuring. The recent Best Council Survey shows good support for training and line management, and the perception of staff is that morale in the Council is now improving; and
 - overall requirements for the Council are recognised in an ambitious People and Organisational Development (POD) Strategy, but sickness absence has remained high, at 10.78 days in 2007/08.

On the whole, the Council now works as one team, working to deliver individual, team and corporate objectives.

- 39** The Council is committed to improving Value for Money (VfM), and overall arrangements are good. Council services deliver good value for money to local residents. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) gives examples of where value for money has been improved and arrangements for delivering better VfM have been strengthened. A fundamental budget review in 2006/07 released £2 million savings. Joint procurement activities with other councils have delivered better purchasing arrangements and is expected to achieve almost £282,000 savings over four years. All services demonstrate how their costs and performance compare to other authorities and what efficiency savings they will deliver in the future. These measures help to ensure that expenditure is in line with priorities, and that services continue to deliver good value for money.
- 40** Financial management is effective. The MTFS is regularly reviewed and changes made as needed. For example, councillors recognise the pressures brought on by the 2009/10 budget, where there remains a projected budget deficit. The integration of financial and service planning is helping to identify low priority services and service efficiencies, such as joint working. Other schemes have been revisited - such as re-introducing energy efficiency measures into the Louth Leisure Centre in order to reduce fuel bills and improve the environmental sustainability of the scheme. Good arrangements are in place to identify where savings can be made.

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

- 41 Scrutiny is not fully effective. Although Scrutiny has carried out a number of reviews, there is limited evidence that the Executive act on the proposals and findings. Links between the forward work plans of the Executive and Scrutiny are not clear. For example, the Overview Committee can allocate work to either of the two Scrutiny committees but these do not have clear terms of reference. These restrict Scrutiny's role in both policy development and robust challenge of services. Scrutiny is therefore not being used to its full potential to either develop policy or contribute effectively to improving services.
- 42 The Council is improving access to services. Partnership working with the County Council has helped to establish one-stop shops where both councils jointly provide information on their services from one location. Plans are well advanced to improve shared access at Horncastle and Alford town halls as well as moving the Tourist Information Centres and service centres together. The Council is using ICT to improve access to services through the website and to support home visits for benefits claims. It has introduced the facilities for post offices and village convenience stores to accept payment for Council services. As a result, services are becoming more accessible to local people.
- 43 East Lindsey works effectively with a range of partners to increase capacity. Shared services are being developed with other councils in Lincolnshire. Current arrangements cover procurement and legal services - this is providing specialist legal services that the Council would not have normally, as well as saving money. The Council has also effectively created capacity to address emerging needs. Working with partners from the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) has improved the monitoring of CCTV and increased the number of uniformed police officers and Community Support Officers. Following severe flooding in summer 2007 and January 2008, the Council created a Flood Forum (with key partners) and established a Specialist Drainage Investigation Team. By working proactively with partners, the Council has increased the capacity and the communities' ability to reduce the damage that future flooding may cause.
- 44 However, some partnerships are not effective. The relationship with some town and parish councils is not constructive and some issues have remained unresolved; this detracts from providing improved services to those local communities. Despite recent improvements in the organisation and effectiveness of the LSP, there are limited examples of where work from the LSP has brought positive outcomes for local people. Yet there are good examples of where LSP partners have worked together to deliver good outcomes, such as the First Contact scheme which helps the most vulnerable people to access services. The Council and the LSP are working to improve the effectiveness of this important partnership, but until all partnerships operate effectively, capacity can not be maximised.

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

- 45 The Council effectively uses external funding to increase its capacity in priority areas. It has used its own resources to successfully lever in external funding. For example, work on the Coastal Action Zone has secured £9 million from external sources for regeneration activities along the coastal strip. Partnership working with Eastern Shire Housing Association has brought in over £10 million since 2004, resulting in the completion of over 200 affordable housing units. In addition, this housing scheme provided NVQ based training and a commitment to use local builders and source building materials locally.
- 46 Arrangements to ensure staff and councillors work within the ethical framework are effective. The Standards Committee has an independent chair and a further three external representatives. Officer and councillor codes of conduct are clear, and have been supported by a training programme. The Standards Committee and the ethical framework have a higher profile as a result and councillors and staff are more able to implement the framework in practice.

Performance management

- 47 The Council is performing adequately in this area. Performance management arrangements are effective. Responsibilities are clearly stated. The management team and Executive receive regular performance reports and progress against strategies. The Council scorecard gives a quick overview of key indicators, including trend and whether on track to meet targets, and integrated financial and performance reporting. This enables people to see quickly how the Council is performing. There are regular updates against targets and plans (such as the Corporate Improvement Plan) to address performance where this is not meeting targets. This provides a good overview to address areas of underperformance, but targets are not always clear or explicit and management of partnerships, especially the LSP, is underdeveloped.
- 48 Arrangements to manage performance are effective. Management Team and the Executive receive clear reports each month, including a Corporate Score Card which identifies 28 key indicators, across a range of priority services. This report gives a quick overview plus supporting detail, set against targets with trend information and incorporates performance and financial information. The Overview Committee also considers performance management reports and takes action where appropriate. Although the level of challenge from councillors varies, performance has improved in a range of areas, such as revenues and benefits. Performance reports are published on the Council's website and service relevant information published, such as at the Customer Access Points. The annual Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan reports to a wider audience on plans and performance in line with corporate priorities as well as achievements from the previous year. As a result, the Council has up to date and relevant information to use to manage performance and local people and partners are aware of the Council's ambitions and past performance.

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

- 49 The Council maintains focus on improving poorly performing areas. Areas for improvement are included in the Council's scorecard and are monitored. For example, councillors were concerned with the performance of planning enforcement, where there was a backlog and complaints were increasing. By investing some additional resources, and improving management, the Council has reduced the number of outstanding cases by 50 per cent. As a result, the number of complaints about the service has fallen. Sickness absence, another poorly performing area, is now starting to show some signs of improvement. Recycling and revenues and benefits have both shown substantial improvements because of performance management. Performance management is therefore leading to improvements in service delivery.
- 50 Target setting, for improvement, is not consistent across the Council; not all outcomes are clearly stated and not all targets are achievable. Most, but not all, projects in the Ambition Plan have clear criteria against which to judge improvement. Targets for recycling, revenues and benefits and planning have been challenging yet achievable, and these services have all improved, but targets to reduce sickness absence are over-ambitious. These were 'designed to drive improvement', but as a result milestones are not achieved, and sickness absence is regularly flagged up as a 'red risk' on the scorecard. Inconsistent target setting means that not all service or outcomes benefit from the clarity of performance reporting.
- 51 Project management processes, for corporate projects, are robust and effective. All approved projects are subject to a detailed appraisal process to identify, amongst other things, the annual costs, timescales and risks. Projects cannot proceed without this appraisal having first been completed. Business Managers have to complete a detailed Project Initiation Document (PID) for each scheme on the list. These PIDs include a more accurate assessment of costs, the timescale and associated milestones for delivery and predicted outcomes. Mid project reviews have been introduced - these helped identify further energy savings initiatives to be incorporated into Louth Leisure Centre. Effective project management means that new initiatives and developments are likely to be effectively implemented.
- 52 The Council manages risk well. Risks are reviewed as appropriate, taking into account risks outside the direct control of the Council, and recorded in the risk register. The MTFS clearly sets out the potential risks affecting the financial strategy of the Council and identifies ways to mitigate these. Flooding and climate change were recently reviewed and split into two defined risks. This enables a more sophisticated response, such as pursuing schemes to reduce the risk of flooding whilst containing the detrimental risks associated with climate change.
- 53 External challenge and customer feedback is used effectively to improve services and strengthen the Council's capacity. There are a number of examples of where the Council has varied services in response to customer views and feedback, including the change in rubbish collection day, changes to swimming pool temperatures and improvements to the Fairy Dell paddling pool. The Council's own Local Performance Indicators show that in September 2008, 67 per cent of all user feedback led to changes to policy or procedure compared to a target of 40 per cent. Feedback from external organisations also leads to improvements, such as using the Investors in People assessment to improve training, communications and appraisals. As a result, capacity is improving and services are becoming more responsive to users' needs.

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

- 54 Performance management within partnerships remains undeveloped. For example, the LSP adopted a framework during early 2008 to develop performance management arrangements. However, it is not yet embedded and the delivery of the community strategy is focussed on actions rather than outcomes. Project management within partnerships is well developed, with quarterly analysis against milestones and a red/amber/green coding used so that managers and the Council can focus on actions where partnerships are not meeting agreed milestones. But until performance management is fully embedded within partnerships the Council is unable to rely fully on partnerships to deliver the outcomes anticipated.

What has been achieved?

- 55 The Council is performing well in this area. The Council has successfully maintained areas that were already performing well, and improved other areas.
- 56 Last year, 66 per cent of indicators improved, above the average for English district councils, and 42 per cent of Best Value Performance Indicators (from a basket selected by the Audit Commission) were in the top performing 25 per cent of English councils, which is better than average; over the last three years the Council has improved 64 per cent of indicators, again better than average for English district councils. Over the same period the Council has successfully improved internal processes addressing the weaknesses identified in the previous corporate assessment.
- 57 The Council has made significant improvement in most areas where it has focussed attention. It is now amongst the best performing 25 per cent of councils in terms of interactions carried out electronically, the time to process benefits claims (both new claims and changes in circumstances) and the proportion of household waste sent for recycling, although sickness absence has not reduced. It has maintained good performance in keeping the district clean, payment of invoices within 30 days and the proportion of Council Tax collected.
- 58 Satisfaction amongst local residents, however, is generally low. In 2006/07 (the latest national survey) only 50 per cent of residents were satisfied with the way that the Council ran local services, below the average for all English councils. A number of service areas that had lower satisfaction have significantly improved since the survey, including planning and refuse and recycling. In Louth a community sports complex has opened and a new leisure centre is being built.
- 59 In assessing the Council's overall achievements, we have considered the ambitions of the Council as published in the Council's latest Corporate Strategy.

To improve economic prosperity

- 60 The Council has worked effectively with a range of partners to improve economic prosperity across the district, and ensure the sustainability of the district. The lack of further education colleges in the district meant that people had to travel long distances; this resulted in many of the young people leaving the district in order to gain more qualifications. Working with the County Council, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and local schools, the Council has enabled the Wolds Vocational College to open, providing 240 new training places in construction, motor vehicle engineering and health and beauty. An LSC survey showed that skills shortages were hampering small local businesses. In response, the Council helped fund skills brokers who work with the county Chamber of Commerce, a local college and the LSC to help train up local staff to address identified skills shortages. Four hundred and seventy seven local people have received training to date; over 400 local businesses have been assisted.

What has been achieved?

- 61** A number of varied initiatives have been developed to support the tourist economy across the district. The Council sponsored the Bathing Beauties competition in Mablethorpe, attracting over 250 entrants, and building four unique beach huts to celebrate the first beach hut festival. This attracted international media attention and enabled links to be made with other tourist attractions, such as the John Smith Trail which is popular with visitors from America. It was supported by the Council and partners, with action to improve car parking, including more spaces and facilities for coaches, better access to the northern beach - which provides both access to isolated beaches and the main tourist beach, and a skate park. This supports a variety of initiatives which extend the tourist season, such as sand racing and land yachts.
- 62** The Council is working with local residents and businesses on the redevelopment of Skegness Foreshore - an ambitious scheme to regenerate reclaimed land in Skegness. The scheme aims to broaden the appeal of this popular seaside resort whilst working within the constraints imposed because of the natural beauty of the area and the risks to flooding. Residents in the district have been consulted over options and the Council, and its partners, continue to discuss with local groups the options available.

To nurture our distinctive vibrant communities

- 63** The Council has been successful in meeting its aims for nurturing distinctive vibrant communities and has clear plans to extend arrangements across the district. Local initiatives, that make a difference to a local community, have been introduced successfully in a number of locations. For example, the Council has worked with the community of Alford, after a town appraisal was completed. Working with the town council has enabled East Lindsey to support the community. As a result, the memorial park has been extended, including areas for young and old, and a popular walking route from a housing area to the town centre. This demonstrates how the Council is working to support local communities.
- 64** The Council has responded to other needs across the district. Working with the Police has helped reduce overall crime by 7 per cent; a 'safer zone' was introduced in Skegness to provide advice to club goers, diversionary activities were developed to help reduce anti social behaviour, and CCTV has been enhanced to include automatic number plate recognition. Clear plans, and resources, are in place to extend the successful Neighbourhood Management Project; this has helped local people identify what they need and give them a clear voice in how it should be delivered, such as the redevelopment of the community gardens in Trusthorpe. Developments in Mablethorpe have included the redevelopment of run down holiday chalets in the town centre, to include new housing, a Sure Start facility, library, Town Council offices and a customer access point. Customer access points have also been introduced in other locations across the district, such as in Horncastle, and payments to the Council can be made at local convenience stores.

- 65 An effective response following severe flooding in summer 2007, and again in January 2008, has helped look after local communities. Sand bags and sand were made available across the district; centres were opened to look after people affected by the floods. The Council cleansing team was a finalist in the LGA council workers of the year award following their response to the flooding. After the floods had subsided, additional resources were provided to look after the most vulnerable members of the community and a Specialist Drainage Investigation Team established. Local people were encouraged to report sites where drains were blocked or insufficient. These were investigated - over 260 sites in total. Work with the Environment Agency and the Internal Drainage Boards means that over 200 have been improved already, including those where ownership was not clear, reducing the risk of future flooding. This work involved local people in decision making and used local knowledge effectively.

To reduce inequality to improve the quality of life

- 66 Work to reduce health inequalities is helping improve the health of local people. The Council runs and supports, with partners, a range of innovative activities that are delivered at a very local level. For example, a significant number of people in Mablethorpe were identified as at risk, having a Body Mass Index (BMI) in excess of 30, and therefore unable to have an operation. The Council worked with the PCT and the local GP surgery, appointed two referral specialists and even put exercise equipment into the GP surgery. So far, 771 people have been referred with an average weight loss of 2.5kg per person, enabling most people to undergo their operation. The Council and partners have adopted targets to reduce BMI over the next few years.
- 67 The Food for Life initiative encourages people to cook healthy meals, with cooking demonstrations at local supermarkets. Almost 2000 people have attended the weekly sessions in Skegness, and the scheme is now being rolled out to other supermarkets in other towns.
- 68 The First Contact initiative is helping ensure older people get access to all the services they are entitled to. Whenever an organisation has contact with an older person, a checklist is used to put them in touch with other organisations which may be able to help. One visit enabled Age Concern to arrange to get a smoke alarm fitted, arranged financial and benefits advice for the household and their carer, and somebody to look after their garden which was becoming a mess. Additionally, home visits are now offered for benefits claims, and the speed of processing benefits claims has improved significantly. This helps improve the quality of life of vulnerable local people.
- 69 Activities are not restricted to health. Inter-generational sessions, encouraging young and old to mix, have been run, including successful dancing sessions plus cooking and bowls. Lack of access to facilities for young people is addressed through a Funk Bus which visits 23 locations across the district, with internet access, games and somewhere for young people to gather. To encourage safety around water, the Council ran a SAFE campaign - with over 1,000 young people attending safety sessions. The Council also arranged for a local primary school that was a long way from any council pools to use a pool at a local holiday centre for their swimming lessons.

What has been achieved?

70 The Council is working well to address the housing needs of the area, although needs remain high. There are over 5,000 households on the waiting list for a home in the district. In response, the Council has secured over 300 affordable homes and a further 408 adaptations. The number of people in temporary accommodation has reduced from over 150 to 35 (at the time of the inspection) and the Council had stopped using bed and breakfast accommodation and leases dedicated units. The Council works with Nightstop UK to help prevent young people from becoming homeless. There are sufficient homes allocations to allow the Council to meet its obligations within the Regional Spatial Strategy, and deliver a further 250 affordable homes.

To put residents at the heart of all we do

71 A number of initiatives have been introduced to put residents at the heart of what the Council does. In particular, consultation has improved, such as through the consultative panels for the refurbishment of Jubilee Park, neighbourhood management pilots and the area committees. The Council has responded well to the lack of attendance by some town and parish councils at area committees, extending public consultation through road shows and questionnaires, and by supporting an active Citizens Panel - the last consultation achieved a response in excess of 80 per cent.

72 The Council has successfully improved access to services. The Customer Access Points, operated in association with a range of partners, are open longer and have enabled other services to operate for longer - such as some libraries. The website has been improved with more information, more services able to be accessed via the web, and payments to be made. The Council newsletter, The Messenger, has been improved and is distributed to all households in the district; it is edited by local groups and covers issues relevant for the district, and articles written by local people.

73 Improvements have been made following customer complaints. For example, the backlog of planning breaches waiting to be investigated was a source of frustration for local people. The Council invested in this area, and the number of breaches waiting to be investigated dropped from 900 to 190. Low satisfaction with the planning service was addressed by adopting multi-disciplinary teams and implementing the Quality of Service planning checklist - speed of determining planning applications improved considerably. The Council actively monitors feedback from the customer access points and telephone answering. The Neighbourhood Management Pilot in Mablethorpe had over 200 local people attend the Residents' Forum meeting, and the scheme is being extended to other communities.

To be green, open and ethical

74 The Council has significantly improved its approach to looking after the environment. The refuse and recycling service now covers the entire district and achieved a 58 per cent recycling rate during 2007/08, making it the highest recycler in England. The Council also maintains the local environment effectively. Only five per cent of relevant land does not meet acceptable standards of cleanliness - amongst the top performing councils in England.

- 75** Corporately the Council is starting to look at how it can reduce its own impact on the environment. It switched to using electricity produced from renewable sources in 2003, and has reduced its emissions of carbon dioxide by 8,000 tonnes as a result. It has calculated its 'carbon footprint', and is working with the Carbon Trust to identify actions it can take to reduce this. A range of environmental initiatives including combined heating and power (which recovers 'waste' heat), rainwater harvesting and automatic lighting controls are being incorporated into the Louth Leisure Centre. Other initiatives include developing old landfill sites, such as at Horncastle and proposals in Skegness and making better use of technology to enable more homeworking.
- 76** Access to services has improved for all people. All new customer service centres are fully accessible. The Council's website includes options for it to be read aloud and translated into a variety of languages. Consultation results, and feedback from public meetings, are all published on the Council's website. One third of taxis licensed by the Council are now adapted to carry a wheelchair, and local taxi drivers are required to attend training on equalities and diversity.

To be an aspirational high performing council

- 77** A wide range of services are performing well - refuse and recycling, cleanliness, revenues and benefits and the speed of determining planning applications, and services are improving faster than the district council average. Internal processes are efficient and effective, such as collection of council tax and speed of paying invoices. New innovations are driving improvements, including the management restructure and the integration of financial and service planning, which have already enabled efficiencies to be identified and re-directed into priority areas. The Council is delivering good value for money.
- 78** Recent changes are building on improvements to date. The Council has achieved Level 2 on the Local Government Equality Standard, and there are good and robust plans, currently being implemented, to achieve Level 3 by early 2009. Investment in ICT infrastructure is enabling services to be delivered flexibly, and remote working trials are being considered. Some services are being delivered jointly, and this is seen as positive both for quality - in terms of cost, efficiency, and resilience of service, and to improve the skills and knowledge of staff, such as through joint working to implement professional qualifications in revenues, rating and valuations.

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 East Lindsey District Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 6 to 10 October 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

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