Comprehensive performance assessment

Corby Borough Council
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Introduction

1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is part of the wider agenda set out in the Local Government White Paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services*. The White Paper encourages greater focus on improved services for local people by freeing good councils from central government controls and restrictions, and providing poorer councils with more, and better focused, support for improvement. CPA is the first step in this process, that of making an overall judgement of where each council stands.

2 This report presents an analysis of the council’s overall performance as well as two short diagnostic assessments which cover important areas of responsibility. It also includes an assessment of the council’s benefit service by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, and the appointed auditor’s assessment of performance on each of the main elements of the code of audit practice. The appendices to this report set out further details on the findings of these assessments and the framework for CPA.

3 The official version of this report is also available on the Audit Commission’s web site at www.audit-commission.gov.uk. The Audit Commission cannot verify the accuracy of and is not responsible for material contained in this report which has been reproduced by another organisation or individual.
Corby Borough Council is a weak council which is significantly improving from a low base. The council has recently redefined its priorities with regeneration as the top priority and, with improved services underpinning it; however, services have been poor and the governance arrangements have not facilitated decision making. Improvements are visible with cleaner streets, new housing and new businesses, however, some core services are still performing poorly.

Corby Borough Council has a clear and articulated 25 year long term vision for the borough of Corby. This vision cascades into a clear ambition “to double the population of Corby by 2030, with a complementary increase in jobs, prosperity and the quality of local public services”. This ambition is known and understood by staff, stakeholders and partners, and can be found in the community strategy, corporate plan, partners and other organisations’ plans.

The council’s underlying priorities are well founded on a wide range of consultation and sound community and local knowledge. There has been effective communication of the council’s priorities internally and externally. The council has effective and visible leadership from senior officers and the leader of the council both in the delivery of its ambition and in community leadership.

The council’s decision making structures are not effective and public meetings are not easily accessible. There is confusion as to where reports go, causing delays to decisions. Councillors are not receiving timely and accurate information to enable them to make informed decisions.

The existing political and officer structures, roles and responsibilities do not reflect the council’s priorities. The council’s performance management has not been effective and the existing performance management framework is not focused on the council’s priorities.

The council has achieved significant and visible achievements in the area of regeneration. It is working with Catalyst Corby to deliver the regeneration framework which includes housing developments and employment opportunities.

Until recently the council has lacked focus on services and has been in reactive mode. This is evident by the length of time services were performing poorly such as housing repairs and benefits. The council is now taking a proactive approach with the re-engineering of its priorities and associated performance management. The council has therefore, introduced ‘One Corby’. Whilst not a wide departure from the council’s previous priorities, the four priorities are underpinned by better defined objectives and an improved performance system known as ‘Mission Possible’. However, plans to deliver the community strategy, ‘One Corby’ and some key objectives are not developed or SMART.

The council is investing in key areas to improve on its weaknesses and strengthen building blocks, including an improved financial position and a more open approach to alternative methods of service delivery. This new approach is starting to have an effect on the quality of some services with streets visibly cleaner, housing standards improving and recycling increasing.
## Summary of assessment scores

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<tr>
<th>Top level question</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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Corby Borough Council scored well in four out of ten of the areas assessed.
Recommendations

12 It is recommended that the council:

- actively and promptly shares the findings of this assessment with the public, partner organisations, councillors and staff; and
- uses the strengths and weaknesses identified in this report as the basis for its improvement planning.
Context

The locality

Corby Borough Council is in the county of Northamptonshire. The borough covers an area of 8,115 hectares and contains large tracts of countryside and green spaces including much within the new town area. The A14 passes nearby providing easy access to the M1 and A1. The main centre of population is the new town, surrounded by the seven villages of Cottingham, East Carlton, Gretton, Middleton, Rockingham, Stanion and Weldon.

Corby has a population of 53,700 with 16 per cent at pensionable age and 23 per cent having been born in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland or Ireland. In terms of housing, 63 per cent of people are owner/occupiers, 28 per cent rent from the council and 9 per cent rent either privately or from a registered social landlord. Skills levels are below average with 30 per cent of 16 to 60 year olds having poor numeracy and literacy. Health is also below average (33 per cent above the national average premature mortality rate) and crime is above average.

Corby's steelworks dominated the economic, social and environmental life of the town from its construction in the 1930s until its closure in the 1980s. The closure had a devastating effect on the economy and social well-being of the area from which it is still recovering. In terms of employment, 34 per cent work in manufacturing (over 250 businesses), 25.2 per cent in distribution, 14 per cent in public administration and 11 per cent in finance. The average weekly wage is £316.23 compared to a national average of £402.69. The index of multiple deprivation ranked Corby as 82 out of 354 councils. The most deprived ward is Kingswood which is in the bottom 25 per cent of deprived wards throughout the country and overall 42 per cent of wards are in the 25 per cent most deprived. Unemployment, although falling, is above average at 3.9 per cent and a significant number of people are dependent on some form of benefits.

The council

Labour hold overall political control with 18 of the 29 seats. The Conservatives hold nine seats and the Liberal Democrats hold two. The council adopted a new political structure in October 2001, with a streamlined committee and scrutiny structure including two executive decision making committees, namely the community committee and the resources & regeneration committee. The council also has three overview & scrutiny panels; resources & regeneration; community; and democracy & governance. The council has a new chief executive who was appointed in September 2003.

Corby employs over 380 staff and has a core management team that includes the chief executive, deputy chief executive and corporate director. In addition, there are eight heads of service, who are responsible both for delivering on the strategic direction of the council and also the management and co-ordination of day to day activities.

The council’s net revenue budget for 2003/04 was £6.9 million, with a gross general fund budget of £27.2 million, a housing revenue account budget of £10 million and a capital programme of £9.1 million.
19 The borough has been included in the ‘Milton Keynes and South Midlands Growth Plan’. The area, including the whole of Northamptonshire, is one of four areas identified for economic and population growth over the next thirty years as part of the Officer of the Deputy Prime Minister’s (ODPMs) ‘sustainable communities’ plan launched in 2002.

20 The council carried out, as requested, a scored self assessment for this inspection against each of the corporate assessment themes. The self assessment was informed by a peer review commissioned by the council and undertaken by SOLACE in March 2004. Using the Audit Commission’s scoring mechanism the council has assessed itself as fair.
What is the council trying to achieve?

Ambition

21 Strengths outweigh weaknesses.

22 Corby Borough Council has a clear and articulated 25 year long term vision for the borough, which is to “work together for the future to improve the quality of life for the people of Corby”. This cascades into an ambition to deliver the vision, namely: “to double the population of Corby by 2030, with a complementary increase in jobs, prosperity and the quality of local public services”. This ambition is known and understood by councillors, staff, stakeholders and partners, and is reflected in the community strategy, corporate plan, partners and other organisations’ plans.

23 Corby Borough Council understands the needs of the community and what is required to improve the quality of life. Corby was originally planned to have a population of 85,000, based on critical mass for the town and facilities; however, in 1980 steel production ceased with a devastating effect and the population is now just 53,700. The ambition is a 25 year plan based on regeneration, creating sufficient population to support a town the size of Corby, with new employment opportunities and support facilities.

24 Corby is giving clear leadership and developing capacity to facilitate delivery of its ambitions. It established an urban regeneration company (URC), called ‘Catalyst Corby’, in 2001 and published a regeneration framework which focused on increasing the population to over 100,000 and creating 30,000 extra jobs to achieve a self sustaining community.

25 Corby has some realistic plans to deliver its ambition of doubling the population with the associated infrastructure. These plans include job creation, housing development and plans for a comprehensive improvement in Corby town, with the Parkland Gateway, a civic hub with new library and new leisure facilities. The URC is project managing delivery of regeneration. There are also clear priorities for improving public services however; comprehensive delivery plans are not fully developed. The council has developed a sub-regional role particularly in the Milton Keynes South Midlands Growth Plan. This role is in support of the council’s ambition for attracting additional housing and attracting additional employment with the associated infrastructure.

26 The council has effective and visible community leadership from senior officers and the leader of the council. Partners, staff, voluntary organisations and parishes all said that the quality of leadership of the community had increased significantly in the last 12 months, with the chief executive and leader both being prominent in the community and making clear the council’s priorities. The council led on the creation of the local strategic partnership (LSP), with partnerships being developed in police, health, education and the private sector. This resulted in the community strategy, “Inspirational Corby”, in September 2003 and led to ambitions being determined by working with partners and the community.

27 The council recently introduced ‘One Corby’, a clear guide to deliver the ambitions, including regeneration and with a focus on basic services, something
which has not been consistent in the past. Priorities are identified, and the intention is to underpin this with a focused performance management system, called ‘Mission Possible’. This document was sent to every household and all partners in the borough.

28 The council has improved its internal leadership in the last year, with improved communication by the leader and chief executive of the council’s ambitions and ‘One Corby’ and with performance in some areas starting to improve.

29 Elements of the council’s vision are not underpinned by delivery plans. There is also a lack of clarity on specific outcomes. For example whilst the ‘One Corby’ document identifies key projects, there is not yet an underlying plan pulling together how some of the projects will be delivered.

30 Whilst the community strategy supports the council’s key ambitions, there is no SMART\(^1\) plan to identify how it will deliver its plans or support the council’s vision, although a conference is planned for September with the LSP partners and community to revisit the actions and develop a delivery plan.

**Prioritisation**

31 Strengths outweigh weaknesses.

32 The council has established clear priorities identified in the corporate plan of 2002 and redefined in the recently published ‘One Corby’ document. These priorities are underpinned by specific service areas and projects, giving an improved focus on priority delivery. The priorities in the community strategy are all in line with the council’s giving a clear direction for all. The council’s priorities are:

- regeneration;
- environment;
- community and
- leadership.

33 These priorities are well founded on a wide range of consultation and sound community and local knowledge. The basis for the original priorities (economy, community, environmental sustainability and leadership) was the corporate plan published in 2002. In 2003 the council undertook a community consultation week, including events for young and older people, such as “consultation tea dances” aimed at older people, and “business breakfasts”. This led to the revised priorities in the ‘One Corby’ document. The council recently established a people’s panel to decide priorities within services, such as recycling methods and a crime audit.

34 The council consults residents to decide priorities. For example community safety was one of the key priorities for residents and therefore the council invested in

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\(^1\) SMART – Smart, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely.
the introduction of police community support officers. The council consulted with tenants over possible future changes to the ownership and management of council housing. However the council’s approach to social inclusion is under-developed. For example, the people’s panel is not representative of the community.

35 The council is prioritising capital schemes in accordance with priorities. The council has a clear framework for assessing capital schemes for inclusion in its programme. Each item is assessed and those that meet a legislative requirement separated out. The remainder are scored against three criteria - contribution to corporate objectives, impact on performance/outcomes and impact on revenue budgets. Schemes are arranged in priority order and scores agreed by a corporate asset management group.

36 There has been effective communication of the council’s priorities internally and externally. The leader and chief executive do monthly talks to all staff to discuss concerns and communicate the priorities. Staff are clear about the priorities and that regeneration is the key for Corby. There is now also a stronger emphasis on frontline services such as clean streets, achieving the decent homes standard and recycling. Partners are not only clear about the priorities but in many cases these are reflected in their own plans, such as the education plan for the new City Academy and three primary schools and Catalyst Corby. Partners’ priorities have also been reflected in ‘One Corby’. The priorities have also been communicated to the public with the ‘One Corby’ document being circulated to all residents.

37 The council’s priorities reflect local and national priorities. For example the council’s strong focus on regeneration includes an aggressive push to build new housing, which is in accordance with the regional strategy for house building; indeed Corby is seeking to take the allocation of some of its neighbouring districts. The council is also significantly improving its approach to recycling, reflecting government targets.

38 Additional resources are targeted to priority areas and money has been shifted from some non-priority areas. For example the council funds Catalyst Corby with £250,000 a year and funding has been increased for street scene services and recycling. Expenditure has been directed towards areas of high housing demand and to improve the quality and robustness of housing stock information. The council also reduced funding to leisure and community facilities. For example it closed neighbourhood offices and reorganised housing service to create savings.

39 The council has not systematically and clearly identified non-priority areas. Some work has been done to identify some non-priority areas, such as tourism and financial support for business start up; however this work is still developing.

Focus

40 Weaknesses outweigh strengths.

41 The council has had a strong focus on regeneration but a weak focus on delivering good quality basic services. Whilst there has been some individual service focus, such as achieving the decent homes standard and delivering good quality services for young people, there has been a lack of corporate focus on service delivery. This is evident by the length of time some services have been
performing poorly such as housing repairs. However, there has been a recent improvement on focusing on some key services, with improvements resulting in street scene and recycling and some improving external inspection results.

42 The existing political and officer structures, roles and responsibilities do not reflect the council’s priorities. For example the two decision making committees do not reflect the four priorities. The council appointed lead councillors for certain areas (for example e-government and young people); however these also do not reflect the council’s priority areas and many staff were not aware of their existence.

43 Mechanisms and tools have not consistently supported focus. For example performance management information is weak and has not assisted officers or councillors focus on key services.

44 The council has focused on improving its financial management and position since 2002/03 in order to fund the delivery of services and priorities. The council took decisions to reduce spend; particularly in the area of discretionary spend. The housing revenue account has also improved balances, projected to be £2.3 million at the end of 2003/04, which is a significant improvement on 2002/03.

45 The council has improved its focus on services from a low base. The council has recognised gaps in knowledge and has used external support to increase skills. This is leading to better focus on delivering priorities, for example a wide range of activities in a range of locations for young people and improved recycling supporting the environment. Due to above average crime rates, the council has also had a focus on improving community safety. The contribution to the community safety strategy is clear as is the role in the CASPAR project on the Kingswood Estate, including improved safety lighting and CCTV.

46 The council has focused on regeneration. For example the recent appointment of the chief executive with a regeneration background and ongoing funding and close working with Catalyst Corby. The council has not been distracted from this work and has sustained delivery including increasing numbers of houses and job creation. It has had good cross party working, with agreement that regeneration is the future for Corby, agreed with partners and reflected in cohesive plans. For example in 2001 the council and developers agreed the development of Oakley Vale, a 436 acre site for a science park, 3,000 houses, a neighbourhood centre, two primary schools, integrated network of cycle ways & footpaths and open spaces. The development has taken significant and ongoing focus by the council, with part of it already completed but will take approximately ten years to complete.

How has the council set about delivering its priorities?

Capacity

47 Weaknesses outweigh strengths.

48 The council’s decision making structures are not effective, some councillors’ roles and responsibilities are unclear and public meetings are not easily accessible. There is confusion as to where reports and topics should be referred and some reports have to go between committees, causing delays to decisions or leading to
the chief executive needing to use his delegated authority. The scrutiny role is developing. Each scrutiny panel now has its own overview agenda at the start of the year. Although some members of scrutiny are challenging of individual performance information, it is not timely and there is not a defined proactive role.

49 Councillors do not always receive timely and accurate information to enable them to make informed decisions. Information is sometimes circulated at meetings rather than with agendas.

50 There is a lack of capacity at senior councillor level and councillors are too operational. The leader and deputy leader act as chairs of the two main committees and are doing an effective job. However, the focus of the majority of the council’s activities is with these two councillors.

51 Some councillor behaviour is inappropriate. For example there are isolated incidents of bullying by councillors and sexism in the organisation. The council recognises that there are issues of inappropriate behaviour and some aggressive behaviour at council and committee meetings and has established a working group led by an independent councillor to seek to address the problem with an external independent chair.

52 The council has effective senior management. The senior management has refocused following the appointment of the chief executive. The council had mainly focused on regeneration; however, following a corporate governance inspection (CGI) and work by the council, it was clear that a wider focus had to be taken to improve public services. The new corporate management team demonstrated an effective approach which led to a reorganisation of the management team structure and a new approach to procurement with the outsourcing of a significant contract and improvements in the benefits service.

53 Officers are clear what they are accountable for and committed to the new approach to ‘One Corby’, although this is hampered by the existing committee structure. There is a good working relationship between the chief executive and the leader and deputy leader.

54 There are capacity and skills weaknesses in delivering services, including: project management skills; a procurement strategy which requires updating; and weak cross departmental working. There has also not been an analysis of skills or capacity to deliver the council’s agenda. There is no human resources strategy or organisational development plan to make such an assessment, although there are plans to deliver both.

55 Sickness levels are high and increased from 13.5 days in 2002/03 to 17.9 days in 2003/04 (unaudited), although the council is taking steps to address this level of sickness. The employee development system (EDS) returns are inconsistent and late and staff appraisals in some areas are not seen as a priority.

56 The council now has a sound financial base (with an auditor score judgement score of three) which has substantially improved in the last two years. There is a good asset base which supports regeneration both with land and income generation. The HRA has been stabilised – in 2002/03 it was heading towards a substantial deficit position. A combination of the closure of neighbourhood offices, staff savings and core efficiencies has turned that position around; with
HRA balances being increased by £1 million in 2003/04. The council is debt free allowing more flexibility in using receipts from asset sales.

57 The council has some effective and improving business and community partnership working, aimed at achieving the council’s key priorities. Partners all stated that partnership work was clearly led by the leader and chief executive and had significantly improved over the last 12 months. Partnership working has led to some problems being tackled including new housing, activities for young people and an ‘Autumn Centre’ for over 50s, established following the merger of two centres, leading to a ‘better government for older people group’ with 50 users a day.

58 Whilst there are some good working relations with the county council, there are tensions at a senior political level. Good working relations need to be developed in order to deliver co-ordinated partnerships at the most senior level.

59 There is an improved approach to procurement. The council out-sourced its street scene contract (including refuse collection, recycling, cleansing and grounds maintenance). This is a big departure as it had not outsourced a major service before. The previous quality of street cleansing was poor; however the recent outsourcing has resulted in a noticeable improvement on the quality of street cleanliness. The council also entered into a consortium arrangement with other councils for its internal audit function and identified alternative methods of delivering its community centres.

Performance management

60 Weak with few identifiable strengths.

61 Performance management is weak and has not focused on the council’s priorities. For example information is not of consistent format or quality and is not presented in a timely way. Some targets are not consistent or stretching. Councillors do not feel accountable for performance or have a clear role in performance management.

62 The council does not have an effective performance management framework. The framework was developed in response to the corporate governance report, however it is not yet embedded and has been slow to become part of the culture of the organisation. The council recognises that its performance management framework is not working effectively and is refining it.

63 EDS is not consistently applied across the council. The council established a system which identifies priorities in service plans and links to the appraisal system; however this is not throughout the council.

64 The council has adopted a risk management strategy and developed a strategic risk register but this system is new and not yet established throughout the council. There is not a systematic way of considering risk at an operational and service level.

65 The council’s approach to value for money is improving however it is not consistently considered or measured. The council is not consistently challenging if it achieves value for money for projects and service delivery methods. For
example the housing repairs service has some costly practices and there are no formal arrangements for measuring value for money. The approach to procurement is improving with the impact of the corporate group. It has also outsourced the community centres which improved services, saving approximately £300,000 a year.

66 The council is still developing its contract monitoring arrangements. Following the introduction of the street scene contract, the council did not put in place effective monitoring arrangements; however following performance problems with the grounds maintenance part of the contract, a contract monitoring team has now been appointed and is working closely with the contractor to improve performance.

67 The council does not have a corporate complaints system. The potential of learning is lost and the information is not used in reviewing performance.

68 The council has recognised the need to address poor performing services and so introduced ‘hot spot’ teams and PI clinics. These have looked at identified poorer performance areas including sickness levels and invoice payments. However success of these has been mixed and the way they operate is being updated as part of the revised approach to the ‘One Corby’ agenda.

What has the council achieved / not achieved to date?

Achievement in quality of service

69 Achievement of quality of service is weak with few identifiable strengths.

70 In 2002/03 the council’s performance against national performance indicators was poor. In 2002/03, overall only 8 per cent of performance indicators were in the upper quartile whilst 50 per cent of performance indicators were in bottom quartile and 72 per cent below average. Overall only 28.3 per cent of local people were satisfied with the services provided by the council in 2003/04 according to unaudited figures. In best value inspections of services, the council has scored a ‘poor’ in housing services and a ‘fair one star’ in leisure services.

71 The council has had some weak corporate performance. For example the amount of council tax collected was in the worst 25 per cent of councils and the council’s benefits service has not been of good quality. The time taken to calculate a new claim for benefits was 50 days in 2002/03 against an average of 46 days, with only 77 per cent determined within 14 days and only 95 per cent were calculated accurately. The BFI\(^2\) found that the council had a ‘fair’ service.

72 Rent collection performance is good with 98.3 per cent of rent collected in 2002/03 which placed the council in the top performing 25 per cent of English councils.

\(^2\) Benefits Fraud Inspectorate
Regeneration

73 Despite some positive achievements in regeneration there has been mixed performance in indicators affecting regeneration issues. Performance in planning is above average. In 2002/03 performance in meeting statutory planning response targets was above average and the council met government targets for minor applications. However in 2002/03 standard searches produced in 10 days is amongst the worst 25 per cent performance of all councils, which will affect the saleability of properties for buyers and the council did not meet the government target for other or major applications. The council is slow at paying invoices, which will deter small businesses working for the council, although its ‘PAYIT’ campaign is starting to improve performance in this area.

Community

74 Whilst the council places a high priority on community safety, crime rates are high. The 2002/03 performance indicators identify a poor picture with other councils with five out of eight of the crime and disorder statistics being in the worst 25 per cent of all councils. These related to robberies, motor vehicle theft, violence against the person and sexual offences. The remaining three are in the next to bottom quartile.

75 There has been slow progress on achieving DDA compliance. The council has only recently completed a survey of its properties to identify work required to comply with the act and is now pulling together a contract document to complete the works.

Environment

76 Corby’s performance on the environment is poor. Performance indicators identify that much of the performance is in the worst 25 per cent of councils, including checklist of environmental health best practice, household waste recycled, standards of cleanliness and satisfaction with the council's parks and open spaces.

77 The council’s performance in the management of its housing stock has been weak. This is evidenced by poor tenant satisfaction, the relatively long time taken to undertake urgent repairs, the time taken to re-let council dwellings and the number of weeks spent by homeless households in hostel accommodation.

Achievement of improvement

78 In achievement of improvement weaknesses outweigh strengths.

79 Overall, 50 per cent of performance indicators that were comparable improved between 2001/02 and 2002/03. However 56 per cent of performance indicators in the bottom quartile had not improved. The unaudited 2003/04 performance indicators show that only 44 per cent of comparable indicators had improved against 2002/03 whilst 56 per cent had either remained the same or got worse. In best value inspections of services, the council has scored promising prospects for improvement in housing services and leisure services.
80 The council has improved its overall quartile position between 2001/02 and 2002/03. In 2001/02 the council had 57 per cent of its performance indicators in the worst quartile – this had improved to 50 per cent of indicators 2002/03. Overall the position of those above the average had improved from 22 per cent in 2001/02 to 28 per cent in 2002/03. This is still a low figure compared to other councils; however it is moving in the right direction.

81 Performance against priorities has shown some improvement from a low base. The council has had a strong focus on regeneration and there have been some achievements in recycling, street scene and achieving decent homes standard all showing improvement. Improvements are visible due to new contracts for street scene with monitoring in place, investment for achieving decent homes and in benefits there have been new systems and staff. However these improvements are not yet reflecting in the council’s overall performance indicators.

82 The BFI awarded the improvement prospects for the benefits service as ‘fair towards good’. Since 2001/02 there has been incremental and sustained improvement in benefits. For example in 2002/03 it took an average of 50 days to process benefits; it took 77 days in 2001/02. However, unaudited figures for 2003/04 show that improvement has stayed static since 2002/03.

83 The council tax and benefits office is not accessible for all users. The office is only open to 4.30 p.m. Monday to Friday, does not open on Saturday, and there is no out of hours telephone access. Both councillors and the previous Audit Commission housing report recommended the introduction of payment cards for its tenants and council tax payers; however these have not been introduced.

**Regeneration**

84 The council has achieved significant and visible improvements in regeneration. The number of house completions reached 360 in 2003, compared to just 18 in 1999. The council played a proactive role with ‘Catalyst Corby’ in developing plans and supporting infrastructure for Oakley Vale residential development. Phase one included permissions for 2,940 dwellings and phase two, a further 600 planning applications approved for the development and remodelling of a former quarry. In employment the council has helped attract several new businesses including a ‘Matalan’ distribution centre creating 200 new jobs and the attraction of a new ‘Morrisons’ freezer warehouse with 184 new jobs.

85 Planning performance has declined according to the 2003/04 unaudited figures, although performance on decisions delegated to officers is improving from a low base, according to unaudited figures, from 75 per cent in 2002/03 to 87 per cent in 2003/04. It has also taken eight years to demolish derelict private sector houses in Lincoln Way and there are still limited plans to supply affordable housing, despite some demand being identified in the housing needs survey update in 2003. More recent data in 2004/05 is indicating improved performance in planning.

**Community**

86 The council is implementing schemes to address increasing crime rates. For example, it introduced a scheme of domestic surveys and security upgrades. This has been delivered to 300 burglary repeat victims and vulnerable people living in burglary hot spots. In addition, homes of 370 vulnerable, elderly or disabled
people have received distraction burglary locks paid for and installed through partnership working. In partnership with the police, mobile CCTV cameras have also led to increased arrests.

87 The council is actively tackling anti social behaviour. Five acceptable behaviour contracts have been issued, five anti-social behaviour orders, six notices to tenants and two evictions. Targeted work is being undertaken through the CASPAR project on the Kingswood estate and through the police designating it as a policing priority area. There is also a mediation service in conjunction with Heartlands Mediation Service which has been jointly funded to resolve neighbourhood disputes.

88 The council has a number of local community achievements. For example it successfully devolved the operation of community centres and the Willow Arts Centre. Spending has been reduced including £200,000 for the operation of the Willow Arts Centre. In total 18 facilities are now operated under direct community control, many of which are now thriving.

89 As part of the community priority, improving local health and leisure facilities, the council has introduced ‘active referral’ and ‘cardiac rehabilitation’ at the Lodge Park sports centre. The centre also has an extensive junior programme, competitive clubs, 50 plus club and special needs groups.

90 The council is addressing the needs of young people. For example the ‘Happenin’ Project’, designed to divert young people from crime and anti-social behaviour, provides an extensive programme for 9-13 year olds on a number of estates after school and during school holidays. 2,652 young people attended the summer activities in 2003, compared to 1,729 the year before.

91 The council has played a key role in improving public transport. The council in partnership with the county council and others, obtained funding of approximately £3 million which has resulted in a new fleet of buses for the town, new routes and timetabling. This has resulted in increased bus usage in 2003 of 70 per cent.

Environment

92 The council has identified the environment as a key priority in its ‘One Corby’ document. It identified that “everyone wants Corby to be a clean, tidy and attractive place”. Many achievements are addressing previous weaknesses in this area.

93 Cleanliness in the borough is visibly improving. The council’s performance in street scene was weak and therefore the council outsourced its streetscene contract in January 2004, integrating waste and recycling collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance to provide a seamless approach. In 2000/01 only 42 per cent of local residents were satisfied with cleanliness levels. However residents and other stakeholders are already reporting an improvement, with a survey undertaken between April and June 2004 showing an increase to 53 per cent.

94 The council improved its performance in recycling. It received external funding from DEFRA which was used to introduce a weekly door step service in June 2003, resulting in improved recycling from 3.73 per cent in 2002/03 to 9.1 per
cent to 2003/04 (unaudited); however this failed to meet the government target of 10 per cent.

95 The council has made significant progress in reducing the number of properties not meeting the DHS. At 1 April 2002 around 54 per cent of council dwellings failed to meet the DHS; however by 1 April 2004 this had fallen to 36 per cent.

96 However, the improvements in some areas are not consistent. For example, housing repair services are not improving. Performance on the time taken to complete housing repairs declined from 2002/03 to 2003/04. Housing relet times have improved from 2002/03 to 2003/04, however, they remain lengthy at 52.1 days.

Investment

97 Strong with few identifiable weaknesses.

98 The council has invested in key areas to improve identified weaknesses and strengthen building blocks. The council has been in reactive mode for the last few years, due to poorly performing services and responding to subsequent inspections. The council is now taking a proactive approach with the re-engineering of its priorities and associated performance management.

99 The council introduced ‘One Corby’, which gives clarity and underlying definition to priorities. Whilst not a wide departure from the previous priorities in the corporate plan, the four priorities are underpinned by better defined objectives. The refocused approach to priorities is supported by a revised performance management framework, called ‘Mission Possible’. This refocus has included the identification of key performance indicators to identify if the priorities are being delivered, although further work is required to ensure that these are the most appropriate indicators.

100 There is also an improving approach to reporting the wider quality of service indicators. Whilst delivery plans of the indicators can be found in various service and statutory plans, the council is now in the process of bringing together a single plan for the delivery of ‘Mission Possible’. A performance board is also established to monitor the progress of the key indicators and priorities.

101 Following the adoption of ‘One Corby’, many service plans have been revised to reflect the council’s priorities and team meetings discuss targets. The council has also had poor quality of performance information as evidenced by the BVPP having been qualified in previous years. However last year this position had improved and for the first time the BVPP was not qualified.

102 There are some good developing HR practices. For example the employee development scheme underpins the council’s new ‘Mission Possible’ approach and service plans. There is a well received induction programme for staff which the chief executive attends and includes details of the council’s priorities.

103 There is a draft HR strategy which includes bringing processes together, such as sickness strategy, performance appraisal system and disciplinary procedure. The council is commencing a review to deliver an organisational development plan in
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October 2004. There is also good councillor training developing which includes evaluation of individual councillor needs and training needs assessed.

104 The council, with Catalyst Corby (the urban regeneration company), has invested in clear plans for regeneration. This includes a programme of release of its own property allocated for employment use. For example the development of two new distribution centres on the A43 which will create approximately 700 jobs. There is also a co-ordinated plan for the development of Corby town known as Corby Parkland Gateway. As part of the plan there is to be a civic hub which includes a customer contact centre, a new county council facility and library and facilities for the voluntary sector. Funding of £15 million has been identified in the medium term financial strategy. The whole project is planned to be completed in 2009, is being project managed by Catalyst Corby and is on target.

105 The council is investing in projects to enhance local neighbourhoods. For example, in Canada Square, the council has obtained funding to convert an old neighbourhood office (closed as part of a service redefinition and to achieve savings) into a “centre of excellence” for lifelong learning. Funding is via an SRB of approximately £125,000.

106 There is investment in improving some key services. For example there has been investment in the street cleansing service, with new mechanical sweepers and increased staffing resources including introducing ‘grot squads’ (now known as ‘EPA 90 response team’) targeting hot spot areas. This helped meet the target of 90 per cent of streets meeting a high or satisfactory standard of cleanliness. In housing the council directed resources to improve the quality and robustness of the base information about meeting the DHS. A 100 per cent housing stock condition survey has been commissioned with final results and full survey details expected in September 2004, which will then inform the stock options appraisal. The council has also allocated £6 million in its capital programme for the next five years to achieve DHS.

107 The council is attracting external resources to deliver services. For example the Corby Arts Strategy was recently adopted with a five year action plan for arts development. This is supported with three year funding of £154,000 for arts development from the Arts Council England. There is significant investment in Lodge Park Sports Centre with a refurbished fitness studio (£130,000) to extend the facility for active referral and cardiac rehabilitation with the local health group.

108 The council is making effective use of section 106 agreements to enhance community resources. For example Oakley Vale includes provision of open space, a playing field, bus service, two primary schools and community facilities.

109 The council is working on a number of building blocks to address major gaps. For example there is now a new corporate risk register and work is being undertaken to cascade it into an operational register. A corporate complaints system has been trialled which will be rolled out to all departments.

110 Procurement has also improved with the establishment of a corporate group, the Contracts Gateway Group, with advice available to officers undertaking contracting at any level, a corporate monitoring of process and a timetable for the review of the procurement strategy. Corporate procurement is monitored by the resources and regeneration overview & scrutiny panel. The Contracts Gateway
Group has instituted an audit of its impact and controls mechanism with Consortium Audit. A councillor has also been appointed to lead on procurement.

111 The council has made some difficult decisions with the closure of neighbourhood area offices, out-sourcing community centres and putting out some major contracts to save money and improve services. The council’s approach to VFM has improved with the appointment of a senior accountancy officer (benchmarking) to benchmark financial services and take part in consortia arrangements for the purchase of stationery and electricity. However there are still some weak procurement practices, such as in housing and in the lack of service level agreements for commissioned work from voluntary services.

112 The council’s approach to asset management has improved. An internal corporate group has been established and a stock condition survey of all non-domestic properties has been done to identify work needed to achieve DDA compliance and planned maintenance requirements. Funding has also been identified over the next five years.

113 The council has recognised that there are some cultural behaviour problems and is establishing an independent group to address them. An officer/councillor protocol group has been appointed with an independent chair.

114 The council opens up to external challenge. It monitors the recommendations from the leisure and housing inspections in one of the review panels. The 13 corporate governance inspection (CGI) recommendations were monitored and reported with a “project control system” in a two week cycle which included officers and partners. Regular briefing sessions were also held with staff and the LSP. The council also received and was open to assistance from the ODPM representative and IDeA. The follow up CGI gave a “fair” and “promising” judgement. However although the council has made progress in some areas, it has been slow to achieve some of the recommendations in the CGI report. For example the housing stock options appraisal and the local plan are underway but have not yet been delivered.

115 There has been a lack of co-ordinated improvement to achieve e-government and the council has a weak web site. The leader has taken on the lead member role for the improvement of the project and the council is looking at external suppliers to improve the site.

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

Learning

116 Strengths outweigh weaknesses.

117 The council is self aware. In the self assessment the council was honest about its weaknesses in service delivery. It has identified solutions to problems both in service delivery and in achieving the ‘One Corby’ agenda. Some solutions are already starting to improve performance, such as in street cleansing and benefits. Had the council not learnt from inspections and support it would still be poor.
118 The council has learnt from some external challenge, including the CGI. An improvement plan to address the CGI recommendations has made good progress in several areas including addressing the problems within the direct service organisation, linking the service and financial planning processes more closely together and improving the financial stability of the housing revenue account. However, progress has been slow in preparing a local plan.

119 The council also learnt from the CGI regarding alternatives to service delivery. It outsourced the street scene contract as recommended and then sought alternative methods of delivery of the community centres. These have now been devolved to community groups, are costing less and usage has increased.

120 The council is learning from external agencies including other councils, GOEM, IDeA and making changes as a result. For example it responded to recommendations in the 2003 housing BVI report and agreed with tenants a new tenant participation policy. The council has also visited a number of other councils to identify housing good practice and is looking to implement some of the learning such as in housing repairs. Consultants have been engaged to improve skills such as project management.

121 The council has established internal groups which it is using for internal learning. For example the asset management group has implemented a land protocol to ensure a consistent approach to assets. The corporate gateways group is being used to advise officers on procurement procedures and is seeking to take a corporate approach to larger contracts, with training being undertaken by IDeA.

122 Whilst there is some good learning, there is also some reticence at implementing change and innovative schemes as there has been a blame culture when things have not gone well. There is also no systematic sharing across departments of learning although this is improving with some of the corporate groups sharing some areas of good practice such as in procurement. There is also still some silo working, although this is improving.

Future plans

123 Weaknesses outweigh strengths.

124 Corby Borough Council is clear about what it wants to achieve. It has redefined its priorities in the ‘One Corby’ document. However, plans to deliver the priorities and key strategies are not robust and SMART plans for the delivery of ‘One Corby’ or the community strategy have not yet been agreed.

125 Future plans relating to ambitions have been established although some are not underpinned with SMART targets and milestones. The LSP and council have established a positive relationship, leading to a realistic community strategy and links to the council’s corporate plan. The LSP has signed up to the principles of ‘One Corby’. The council is organising a community conference to establish specific action plans for elements of the community strategy.

126 The council is developing the new corporate plan from the ‘One Corby’ document. Stakeholders, staff and partners are already signed up to ‘One Corby’ and so the new corporate plan is based on a unified vision and priorities for Corby, which has underlying priorities but not yet specific delivery plans.
127 Plans are of mixed quality and not all of the council’s plans have SMART targets or clear outcomes. For example the existing HRA business plan does not set out clear and robust future plans and strategies.

128 There is no co-ordinated plan to achieve comprehensive regeneration in the areas of low demand on the Kingswood Estate. Although there are some individual schemes to improve quality of life for residents and demolition of some housing has taken place, there is no overarching plan for the area.

129 Plans have not been reassessed to deliver priorities. For example the council is relying on a local plan, approved in 1997. Plans to meet the decent homes standard are not fully formed as the council is awaiting information from the stock condition survey. Although the council has a plan for improving the town as a whole, there is no commitment from owners of the town’s shopping centre to improvement of the shopping area, even if the council completes all proposed expansion and changes.

130 The council and partners have ranked the priorities. Regeneration is the top priority for Corby. The priorities can be found in partners plans. For example, the regeneration framework for Corby has plans and proposals for creating jobs and increasing Corby’s population. The council has resourced specific plans to deliver regeneration projects, including the Corby Parkland Gateway to improve the town area, which includes a new swimming pool complex and civic hub. There is a project plan for its delivery which is on time.

131 Service plans are developing with links to ‘One Corby’ priorities and targets for delivery. For example technical services has links to priorities and other plans and includes targets for delivering decent homes standard and clean streets. There are also established plans for the next stages of recycling, including internal and external funding. The benefits service has an improvement plan which includes the developing use of IT and milestone targets for improvements. Plans for the improvement of services have emanated from senior officers and councillors and there has been a strong commitment from staff for improvement.

132 The council is clear about what it is seeking to achieve in relation to the DHS; however there is not yet a clear delivery plan as the stock condition survey has yet to be completed. Targets have been set to achieve significant reductions in numbers of properties failing to meet the DHS within the council’s stock of around 5,700 dwellings. Ambitions are set out within the best value performance plan, the technical services business plan, and the housing services business plan. The council’s capital programme 2004/05 to 2008/09 sets out the level of capital funding required to achieve the reductions in the level of non-decency with £6 million per annum being provided.

133 There are supporting plans to improve capacity to deliver priorities. These include a communications strategy, risk management framework, medium term financial strategy and human resources strategy. The budget setting process was done in consultation with partners and led to money being prioritised to deliver plans.

134 The council is reviewing its scrutiny approach and has instigated a review of its decision making structure and the associated officer structure to match priorities. There are not yet any timescales for delivering this change.
The asset management plan and capital strategy have both been assessed by GOEM\(^3\) as satisfactory. The council is working with GOEM to ensure its housing strategy is categorised as fit for purpose although it is classed as “not fit for purpose” at the moment.

The council is identifying areas where further improvements are required. In housing, good planned maintenance schemes have been delivered with a focus on achieving good standards of accommodation in areas of sustained demand for the housing stock. A survey has been carried out of the condition of non domestic assets and properties with money allocated to the budget to deal with issues raised and compliance with DDA; however, a planned maintenance programme is still being developed by the asset management group.

\(^3\) Government Office for East Midlands
## Summary of theme scores and strengths / weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambition</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>• Clear long term vision&lt;br&gt;• Realistic ambition&lt;br&gt;• Redefined in ‘One Corby’&lt;br&gt;• Clear understanding of community needs&lt;br&gt;• Effective and visible leadership&lt;br&gt;• Good community leadership&lt;br&gt;• Sub regional role in development</td>
<td>• Some elements of vision lack delivery plans&lt;br&gt;• Lack of clarity on specific outcomes&lt;br&gt;• No SMART plan for community strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritisation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>• Good imaginative consultation&lt;br&gt;• ‘One Corby’ defined priorities&lt;br&gt;• Good communication of priorities&lt;br&gt;• Resources targeted to priorities&lt;br&gt;• Local &amp; national priority aware</td>
<td>• Social inclusion approach is underdeveloped&lt;br&gt;• Lack of clarity about non-priorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Strong focus on regeneration&lt;br&gt;• Attracting business investment for 10 year scheme&lt;br&gt;• Focus on improving financial position&lt;br&gt;• Some service focus e.g. DHS and young people</td>
<td>• Historic lack of focus on basic services&lt;br&gt;• Some services had long term poor performance e.g. housing repairs&lt;br&gt;• Structures do not reflect priorities&lt;br&gt;• Mechanisms and tools not supported good focus on services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Sound financial &amp; asset base&lt;br&gt;• HRA stabilised&lt;br&gt;• Effective partnership working&lt;br&gt;• Introduced new methods of service delivery with some outsourced services and partnerships</td>
<td>• Decision making structures not effective&lt;br&gt;• Councillors do not always receive timely &amp; accurate information&lt;br&gt;• Lack capacity at senior councillor level&lt;br&gt;• No HR strategy or assessment of skills&lt;br&gt;• Some capacity gaps&lt;br&gt;• High sickness levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Hot Spot clinics&lt;br&gt;• Approach to VFM improving and savings identified&lt;br&gt;• Adopted Risk Mgmt strategy and strategic register</td>
<td>• System not addressed poor performance&lt;br&gt;• Does not reflect priorities&lt;br&gt;• Improved risk mgmt but not embedded&lt;br&gt;• Contract monitoring not effective&lt;br&gt;• VFM not consistently measured&lt;br&gt;• EDS not consistently applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in quality of service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Regeneration&lt;br&gt;• Good collection of rent</td>
<td>• Poor performance against indicators over long period&lt;br&gt;• Performance against priorities weak&lt;br&gt;• Some weak Pls in regeneration&lt;br&gt;• Poor performance in environment &amp; hsg&lt;br&gt;• Crime rates increased despite high rate of activity with council and police&lt;br&gt;• Slow progress on DDA&lt;br&gt;• Poor Council tax collection rates&lt;br&gt;• Performance in benefits service&lt;br&gt;• (BFI – Fair)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>Weaknesses</td>
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| Achievement of improvement   | 2     | • Visible street cleanliness  
• Significant regeneration with job creation, house completions & permission for 3,000 houses  
• Provision of community facilities  
• Security upgrades for victims of repeat burglaries  
• CCTV led to 2,500 arrests  
• Addressing antisocial behaviour  
• Good programme & schemes for young people  
• Increased bus usage 70 per cent  
• Progress in DHS                                                                 | • PIs improved but from a low base  
• Still only 28% above average in 2002/03  
• 56% of PIs in bottom qtl not improved  
• 2003/04 unaudited PIs – only 44% of PIs improved  
• Some KPIs have declined e.g. land searches and housing repairs  
• Planning performance declined  
• Housing repairs not improved  
• Not met government recycling target  
• Some lack of accessibility for users |
| Investment                   | 4     | • Addressing key weaknesses  
• One Corby / Mission Possible  
• Improving performance mgmt  
• Procurement decisions made  
• Regeneration - funding identified  
• Arts strategy with funding  
• Improving risk management  
• Stock condition survey  
• Trialled corporate complaints                                                                                           | • Weak web site and co-ordination to achieve e-government                                                                                                                                              |
| Learning                     | 3     | • Self aware  
• Addressing CGI recs  
• Learnt from housing BVI  
• Work with other councils  
• Learnt from external support                                                                                             | • Some reticence at implementing change  
• No systematic sharing of learning                                                                                             |
| Future plans                 | 2     | • LSP / council strategies in line  
• Community conference called to develop delivery plans  
• One Corby – partners signed up  
• Plans to develop town  
• Supporting plans e.g. communications strategy / MTFS / risk mgmt strategy  
• Reviewing structures & scrutiny  
• Targets set to deliver DHS  
• AMP & cap strat – satisfactory  
• Work with GOEM on hsg strat                                                                                               | • Plans to deliver One Corby and Community Strategy not developed or SMART  
• Some plans not reviewed regularly  
• No formal commitment from shopping centre owners to improve Corby shopping centre  
• Local plan outdated  
• Plans of mixed quality and not all SMART plans  
• No over arching plan for Kingswood                                                                                           |

**Scoring key:**
1 - Weak  
2 - Weaknesses outweigh strengths  
3 - Strengths outweigh weaknesses  
4 – Strong
Appendix 1 - Decent homes standard (DHS) diagnostic assessment

What is the council trying to achieve in relation to the standard? Does the council know the condition of their housing stock and their compliance with the decent homes standard?

137 Low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.

138 The council is clear about what it is seeking to achieve in relation to the DHS. Targets have been set to achieve significant reductions in the numbers of properties failing to meet the DHS within the council’s stock of around 5,700 dwellings. Ambitions are set out within the best value performance plan, the technical services business plan, and the housing services business plan. The council’s capital programme 2004/05 to 2006/07 sets out the level of capital funding required to achieve the reductions in the level of non-decency with £6 million per annum being provided. With this level of expenditure the council is confident that it will be able to ensure that all of its council owned dwellings will meet the DHS by 2010. The council has a programme to regenerate council estates within the borough and a major programme to improve and modernise individual properties and improvements to amenities and parking areas. These are identified in the council’s corporate plan although the targets are not SMART. The council’s ‘One Corby’ document gives a commitment to better management of the council’s estates.

139 Difficult decisions have been taken in relation to properties subject to low demand and poor design features. The council has a high number of non-traditional properties mainly of a ‘Radburn’ layout, which require significant levels of maintenance and modernisation to meet the DHS. The council’s housing strategy 2002/07 sets out the decision taken to prioritising resources to focus on areas of high demand in the borough, and those properties which would be sustainable and meet the needs of tenants in the long term. The council’s ‘One Corby’ agenda for the regeneration of the borough gives a commitment to redevelop around 300 low demand properties on Kingswood and Arran Way, within the council’s overall aim of improving the housing stock generally. However, existing progress on the implementation of this mixed tenure housing renewal strategy has been slow. The managed decline of these low demand areas has not been well co-ordinated by the council. Some small scale demolition of privately owned properties has taken place, but much more redevelopment remains to be completed.

140 The base information to help the council understand what needs to be done to meet the DHS is not wholly robust or comprehensive. A stock condition survey was carried out in 2001 by external consultants. This survey covered 10 per cent of the housing stock on a sample basis, covering all property archetypes; however, it predated the detailed definition of the DHS, and has subsequently been shown to contain some inaccuracies. In order to address these limitations the council has been carrying out on-going surveys of its properties, and recording the findings on spreadsheets to maintain a profile of the condition against the individual DHS criteria, and to provide input into the council’s housing capital programme. Whilst much of this work has supported the findings from the original stock condition survey, the council’s ability to accurately set out the
precise investment needs of the housing stock, and to predict future failure rates is weakened by the quality of the existing baseline data.

141 The council has directed resources to improve the quality and robustness of the baseline information about meeting the DHS. A 100 per cent stock condition survey has been commissioned and the final results and full survey details are expected in September 2004. Initial findings suggest that the condition of the housing stock is broadly in line with current baseline data, and that within current levels of housing capital expenditure the council should be able to meet the DHS criteria by 2010. Refinement of existing plans and strategies are scheduled once the 100 per cent stock condition survey is received, and the information will be used to inform the stock options appraisal work that is currently being undertaken by the council in conjunction with tenant representatives.

142 The council is carrying out meaningful consultation with tenants and others to determine their ambitions and aspirations for the housing stock. A ‘Corby Standard’, which will exceed the DHS, is proposed in the council’s housing services business plan, with a questionnaire having been sent to all tenants in June 2004 to determine tenants’ priorities in excess of the basic DHS. The results of this consultation are planned to inform the stock option appraisal work being undertaken.

143 The council has a mature and effective approach to tenant participation, and engages in meaningful consultation. The council has a good relationship with the ‘federation of residents and tenants associations of Corby’ (FORTAC), with regular consultation on the overall content of capital programmes and works to individual households. A new tenant participation strategy has recently been developed in conjunction with tenants to improve service delivery. Additional resources have been given to tenant participation with an additional officer being appointed through the recent housing restructure. Information on the decent homes standard has been provided to all tenants through newsletters.

144 The council has good quality information about asbestos in council owned property. It has set up an asbestos register based on a survey of the council’s property assets, and an action plan, policies and procedures to deal with asbestos are in place.

145 The council has good quality information about the future demand for council housing. This is based on a housing needs survey which was originally undertaken in 2000 and fully updated in 2003 by external consultants in line with ODPM guidance. The council facilitates a housing needs forum, which meets on a regular basis, and involves tenants groups, housing associations, councillors and external partners. The council’s knowledge on future demand is further supported by a housing renewal strategy study commissioned by the council, from external consultants, in January 2004. This sets out a baseline position on the needs of the housing stock and presents a range of possible options for the future regeneration of mixed tenure housing estates in Corby. The council makes good use of the available housing stock and has not had to resort to the use of bed and breakfast accommodation over the last few years.

146 Robust plans and strategies are not yet fully formed in all areas of the council’s plans to meet the DHS. The lack of up-to-date and robust stock condition information limits the effectiveness of existing plans and strategies. The council has not yet achieved ‘fit for purpose’ from the GOEM for the housing revenue
account business plan or housing strategy, although a timetable to achieve this by March 2005 has been agreed with GOEM.

147 An evaluation of a range of options to meet the DHS and other objectives has been carried out by the council. The council is currently in a second stock options appraisal process. The outcome of the first process, in 2001/02, was not conclusive. It predated the Governments’ plan for sustainable communities and the present substantial expansion of Corby, and was carried out when the council’s housing revenue account was heading into a deficit position. The stock options appraisal process in 2001/02 was carried out by external consultants with considerable experience in the field, and included consideration of all of the available options at the time including large scale voluntary transfer (LSVT), arms length management organisations (ALMO), stock retention and possible private finance initiatives.

148 Effective working with tenants groups and external partners is taking place on stock options appraisal. A budget commitment of £250,000 per annum over two years to support preparatory work has been made by the council and tenants have been directly involved from the start of the new process – for example, they have selected their own independent tenants advisor based on selection criteria jointly agreed with the council. A timetable for the stock options appraisal work has been agreed with the Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM), who have indicated that progress is acceptable and have recognised the efforts that Corby have put into community involvement in the process.

Is the council delivering its plans to meet the decent homes standard?

149 High risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.

150 The council is not yet fully delivering its plans to meet the decent homes standard, partly because it is awaiting the outcome of the stock condition survey. The council has not maximised its capacity to deliver the DHS in all areas. A cautious approach to procurement and the use of reserves has been taken by the council to stabilise the housing revenue account (HRA), and whilst this has increased the level of balances in the HRA, full consideration of the use of this additional financial capacity to meet or exceed the DHS has yet to be undertaken.

151 The financial position has been stabilised in regard to the HRA. In 2002/03 the council’s HRA was heading into a substantial deficit position. The council has rectified this position by a combination of actions including the closure of neighbourhood offices, staff savings and core efficiencies within the housing service. HRA balances are projected to stand at £2.3 million at the end of 2003/04, with a sustainable position being predicted over the medium term.

152 The council has effectively considered the use of its financial capacity to deliver the DHS when formulating the housing capital programme. The council’s capital programme 2004/05 to 2006/07 sets out the level of capital funding to achieve the reductions in the level of non-decency with £6 million per annum being provided. This is in line with the requirements identified within the 2001 stock condition survey. Firm provision is given within the capital programme of funding to this level for five years, with an assumption that this level of funding will be provided for the subsequent two years of a five year housing capital programme. Current plans indicate that this level of funding will be sufficient to meet the council’s plans for the reduction in non-decency based on the 2001 stock
condition survey. Around £3 million of the housing capital funding comes from the Government’s major repairs allowance (MRA) with the balance being funded by capital receipts and other council resources.

153 The council has not maximised non-financial capacity to deliver the DHS. The council’s focus on regeneration for mixed tenure estates is limited by a lack of capacity within the council to deliver complex work programmes to achieve housing renewal, and thereby assist the council’s aims of ensuring that all of the council owned housing stock meets the DHS. The council have, in part, addressed these concerns by carrying out a restructure of the housing department creating a much clearer split between operational activities and strategic activities, with new senior managers being appointed recently. Two permanent and one fixed term appointment have been made to enhance the capacity and skills within housing enabling.

154 Housing IT systems, to assist in achieving the council’s aims and objectives, have not been used in a fully effective way. For example, stock condition information is not fully linked to the council’s responsive repairs system to enable updating to take place, and to ensure that responsive work does not get undertaken immediately prior to planned work on the same property component. The website is not well developed in regard to housing information, gas servicing information on the website is out of date, and tenants are unable to report repairs online.

155 Good planned maintenance schemes have been delivered with a focus on achieving good standards of accommodation in areas of sustained demand for the housing stock. Since the development of the DHS criteria in 2002, planned maintenance schemes have ensured that modernisation work meets the requirements of the DHS, for example, in the modernisation and refurbishment of over 380 properties on the Lloyds Estate that have had extensive new kitchen and bathroom layouts, as well as other modernisation works, in the last 18 months. Tenant satisfaction with planned maintenance schemes is monitored through the use of satisfaction surveys provided to all tenants in receipt of planned maintenance and modernisation work.

156 The council has been able to prioritise resources towards meeting the DHS by an effective performance in spend on capital housing programmes. Capital expenditure against budget has been fully utilised over the last two financial years. The council has, therefore, been able to target resources on the critical areas of failure against the DHS. This is particularly in regard to the thermal comfort criteria in non-traditional housing where the council has targeted resources to establish a programme of replacing heating systems with condensing boilers. However, the pace of change on thermal efficiency of council dwellings is slow. The SAP rating for council owned dwellings is in the bottom quartile when compared to all English authorities at 49 per cent. £2.4 million was allocated through the 2003/04 housing capital programme for additional works to enable improvements to take place in insulation, improved glazing and heating system renewal.

157 The council has made significant progress in reducing the number of properties not meeting the DHS. At 1 April 2002 around 54 per cent of council dwellings failed to meet the DHS, as at 1 April 2004 this had fallen to 36 per cent failing to meet the DHS. The council’s performance against BVPI 184 (b) – the percentage change in non-decency of council owned dwellings in 2002/03 – shows the
council to have performed above the median when compared to all English authorities.

158 The council is not making an effective use of resources through the use of partnerships to deliver work programmes. Procurement methods have been traditional in a number of areas and are not producing the most cost and quality effective outcomes for tenants – in particular around the procurement of planned maintenance programmes, gas servicing and materials supply. The procurement strategy does not reflect modern procurement principles with no reference to Egan or Latham, or the ‘rethinking construction’ agenda. There are no partnering arrangements currently in place for the provision of planned maintenance programmes. The council is not able to fully demonstrate that value for money is being achieved in its responsive repairs service and the service has not been subjected to external competition. The council is also wasting considerable resources in the use of steel cladding for low demand properties on Kingswood and Arran Way – with over £180,000 being spent on steel cladding in 2003/04. The council’s lengthy re-let times of 52 days on average in 2003/04 does also not maximise available resources to contribute to achieving the DHS.

159 The council is not maximising the availability of resources by moving expenditure towards more cost effective planned maintenance programmes from responsive repairs budgets. In 2002/03 the council spent 63 per cent of its revenue repairs expenditure on work that was responsive, with 37 per cent being spent on work that was planned. This is not in line with Audit Commission good practice guidelines, and the council were unable to provide any examples of expenditure being moved from responsive to planned programmes, indicating a more effective use of resources.

160 The council has begun to develop more meaningful partnerships with housing associations. A housing regeneration partnership involving preferred partner housing associations has been formed but still embryonic. This is intended to be directly involved in the redevelopment of areas of low demand housing in future.

How well does the council monitor its progress and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?

161 High risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.

162 Progress towards meeting the DHS has not been monitored in a comprehensive way. It has recently improved the frequency of reporting, but the basis of assessment of progress is still not robust. Detailed progress is reliant upon spreadsheets held by the council’s technical services department, rather than on accurate measurement against a sound baseline position established through an accurate stock condition survey. This position will be capable of rectification when the new stock condition survey commissioned by the council reports in September 2004. The council’s progress on meeting the DHS has in the past been reported annually – new arrangements in 2004/05 require monthly reporting to the council’s corporate management team, and quarterly reporting to the community committee.

163 The council has set targets for the number of homes to be made decent. This target setting clearly shows year on year reductions in the level of non-decency, and was developed in line with the council’s housing capital programme, and the consideration of the availability of financial resources. Tenants have been
consulted on the council’s plans and provided input to the priorities set out in the housing capital programme.

164 Effective budget management of the housing capital programme has taken place through the council’s asset management group. There is monthly reporting against the housing capital programme and actual expenditure against planned programmes has been effective over the last two years.

165 The council has not maintained a focus on achieving the DHS through regular performance monitoring. The council has developed business critical key performance indicators in the ‘Mission Possible’ theme of the council’s vision – ‘One Corby’. However, the council performance on achieving the DHS is not one of the business critical key performance indicators selected. With the council’s vision and ambitions being clearly driven by a focus on regeneration, the absence of BVPI 62 – the percentage of unfit properties made fit/demolished due to action by the local authority – from ‘Mission Possible’ also limits the council’s ability to monitor progress on this key aspect of housing regeneration.

166 The council has not fully evaluated the risk of not meeting the DHS. Although the council has a risk register in place, no formal evaluation of the risk, likelihood or impact of not achieving the DHS has been carried out. Contingency plans to deal with the potential risk of not meeting the DHS are not in place, and existing plans do not factor in any risk elements of, for example, the newly commissioned stock condition survey showing a higher than expected level of non-decency.

167 The council has shown a willingness to learn from others in regard to housing issues. Following the publication of the housing inspection report in June 2003 staff, tenants and councillors visited Telford and Wrekin Council to observe actions taken to address housing condition problems similar to those faced by Corby. The council also learned from interaction with Bassetlaw Council, the London Borough of Greenwich, APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence), and housing inspection.

168 The council has used and learned from external consultants. For example, the use of APSE has brought about considerable change in working practices within the in-house responsive repairs teams, who are no longer employed on ineffective piecemeal arrangements, but are now salaried and operate more flexible customer focussed practices. However, the performance on repair times did not improve during 2003/04 whilst this learning was being implemented.

169 The council has responded to recommendations in the housing inspection report. An action plan has been produced addressing each of the 42 recommendations in the report and progress is reported to the council’s community committee. Progress has been made, for example by developing a new tenant participation strategy, addressing concerns around working practices in the responsive repairs teams, and becoming more customer focussed in handling repair requests.
### Summary of decent homes standard diagnostic judgements and strengths / weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of focus</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What is the council trying to achieve in relation to the standard? Does the council know the condition of their housing stock and their compliance with the decent homes standard? | b     | • Clear ambitions to achieve the DHS  
• Taken difficult decisions to prioritise resources  
• Meaningful consultation with tenants  
• Good information on future demand  
• Evaluation of stock options | • Stock condition baseline information not robust and accurate  
• Current plans not fully effective  
• Not able to predict future failure rates  
• Not yet achieved Fit for Purpose HRA BP or Housing Strategy |
| Is the council delivering its plans to meet the decent homes standard?        | c     | • Stabilised the HRA and increased reserves  
• Good planned maintenance programmes focussed on the DHS  
• Effective spend of capital resources  
• Significant progress made in meeting the DHS | • Lack of non-financial capacity  
• Low SAP rating  
• Ineffective use of modern procurement methods  
• High expenditure on steel cladding  
• Poor responsive/planned split |
| How well does the council monitor its progress and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans? | c     | • Targets to meet DHS in place  
• Effective budget management of planned works  
• Willingness to learn from others  
• Responded effectively to housing inspection report | • Ineffective performance management  
• Ineffective monitoring of progress  
• DHS not included in key business critical PI’s  
• No evaluation of risk or contingency planning |

**Decent homes standard diagnostic assessment judgement**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<td>C</td>
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**Scoring key:**

For each of the key areas looked at within the diagnostic assessments the need for improvement, based upon the risk of service failure and poor outcomes, is identified using the following scale.

- a = very low
- b = low
- c = high
- d = very high
Appendix 2 - Public space diagnostic assessment

How well does the council contribute to the management of the physical environment?

170 There is a high risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.

171 There is limited planned maintenance to maintain or improve environmental quality. For example, there is a lack of planned maintenance programmes for parks and open spaces with a focus on reactive work following the completion of defect forms. External funding of £250,000 from East Midlands Development Agency has been used to undertake environmental improvements to the Phoenix Parkway. Contract staff are in evidence in public areas and are encouraged to report maintenance issues. However, they are not currently identifiable as working on behalf of the council. An internal central telephone number to report issues has been set up. The public can report maintenance issues via the advertised range of telephone numbers, by email, or in person to any of the council offices. The failure to improve environmental quality is evidenced in low public satisfaction with the council’s parks and open spaces, with performance in the bottom 25 per cent of councils in 2000/01.

172 The council is performing poorly in some areas supporting its regeneration priority. For example, the percentage of standard searches carried out in ten working days. In 2002/03 performance was in the lowest quartile with only 30.5 per cent achieved. According to unaudited figures for 2003/04 this fell further to 29 per cent. The council recognises this poor performance and is trying to increase capacity through recruitment, but currently has failed to attract applicants. Retention of staff has also been examined resulting in an improvement to salaries. A review of internal processes and additional clerical support has seen performance on standard searches completed improving to 50 per cent in the first three months of 2004/05, although this is still bottom quartile performance. It is also working in partnership with other local authorities as part of a local delivery vehicle to form a joint planning team. Performance on decisions delegated to officers is improving from a low base, according to unaudited figures, from 75 per cent in 2002/03 to 87 per cent in 2003/04. With such a strong regeneration agenda the potential of this weak performance could impact on the speed of the regeneration. However the joint working with other local authorities may offset this.

173 The council is not effectively influencing the quality of the environment in the shopping centre area of Corby. The council does not own the shopping area; however it is a key part of the overall impression of the town and whilst there is substantial other environmental work planned, the council has no agreement from the owners to improve the standards within the shopping precinct.

174 The council has been slow to meet its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. A stock condition survey was completed in the last few months. Priorities and resources have been identified but no schedule of work. The council is unlikely to achieve 'reasonable adjustments' in relation to the physical features of their premises before the required date of October 2004.

175 There is some clarity within the council’s planning framework about achieving a sustainable environment but the local plan is dated. The environment is both one
of the council’s priorities and one of the community strategy themes. The council understands, as seen within its local plan issues paper, that sustainable development means the integration of economic, environmental and social issues. Progress on the new local plan has not been as swift as planned and the council are therefore relying on a plan approved in 1997 which does not support the vision of intended growth. Updates have been developed to fill some of the gaps but the age of the local plan is causing some difficulty for developers.

176 The council is aware of where and how the local environment needs improving. The council has an LA21 plan which is being updated. Work was undertaken by Rockingham Forest Trust in 2001 which provides good data on the council’s open spaces. This identified that the borough has poor quality open space. It identified few sites with formal gardens and seating, safety in some open spaces as an issue, abuse of public sites including vandalism and under utilisation of larger sites. There is a lack of planned maintenance to address these issues.

177 A quality local environment that meets local needs is being secured where new housing development is taking place. Developers are positive about planners who actively look to facilitate successful planning applications. New housing developments address quality of life issues. Section 106 agreements are delivering an improved local environment with provision of open space, playing field, bus service, community facilities and railway halt at Oakley Vale. £15,000 has been secured from developers to examine how future section 106 contributions can be used to best effect.

178 Performance in planning is above average. In 2002/03 performance in meeting statutory planning response targets was above average, with second quartile for dealing with major and minor applications and top quartile for other applications. Plus the council met government targets for minor and other applications. Unaudited figures for 2003/04 show performance overall declining. In dealing with major applications in 13 weeks, performance declined from 53 per cent to 33 per cent and for other applications in eight weeks from 83 per cent to 74 per cent. But performance in dealing with minor applications in eight weeks improved from 61 per cent to 71 per cent. Currently the council only meets one government target for minor applications, the target being 65 per cent.

179 Pollution, noise and other nuisances are dealt with effectively during working hours. Air quality has been properly assessed and there are no air quality management areas. Procedures are in place for noise and pollution complaints. There is currently no out of hours service to deal with noise complaints, although this is being introduced. The council supports a mediation service dealing with intractable noise problems, but it is too soon to measure its impact.

180 An active interest in wider environmental issues which impact on the locality is taken. A countywide climate change strategy is currently being produced and the council participates in county wide schemes such as ‘chill out’ which offers insulation at half price to all home owners and ‘boiler magic’ which offers condensing boilers at the price of a conventional boiler. These assist in increasing energy efficiency and reducing harmful emissions. A strategic flood assessment is currently being undertaken. However there is no accredited environmental management system in place or being worked on.
Does the council help keep the locality clean?

181 There is a high risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.

182 Measures to increase recycling and composting have only recently been introduced and have in the past been limited. Following a successful DEFRA bid in 2003/04 weekly doorstep recycling was introduced in June 2003 to all households collecting newspaper, magazines, pamphlets, cans and glass. This is in addition to the seven council bring sites which take a variety of material and are focused on the town and key villages. According to unaudited figures for 2003/04 the council failed to reach its statutory recycling target of 10 per cent, achieving 9.1 per cent. This is a significant improvement on the total of 3.73 per cent in 2002/03. Satisfaction with recycling was 48 per cent in 2000/01 which was in the bottom 25 per cent of councils. A more recent survey of 1,173 residents in 2003/04 which was a significant increase to 82 per cent.

183 There is limited evidence of the waste hierarchy being applied. Currently side waste is collected. An education officer has recently been appointed and is now working with schools. There are plans to establish a programme of education and publicity to encourage waste minimisation and recycling as part of the council’s recently agreed street scene strategy. Composting is already promoted and a recycling and reusing furniture partnership is in place. Other work is at a county level with the ‘slim your bin’ roadshow and county education bus. There is no other working with neighbouring councils. The amount of waste collected fell from 437 kilograms per head of population in 2002/03, third quartile performance, to 428 kilograms in 2003/04 (unaudited figure), which is against the national trend.

184 Satisfaction with the waste collection service is poor. In the latest audited satisfaction figures, 2000/01, 82 per cent of local residents were satisfied with the waste service they receive. This put the council in the bottom quartile. A more recent survey of 1,173 residents showed only a marginal increase to 85 per cent.

185 The council is likely to reach its statutory recycling rate for 2005/06. The introduction of a pilot green waste service in the rural areas and one of the town wards is being introduced during 2004/05. Monthly rates for recycling are currently achieving 12 per cent. The new contractor is contractually committed to achieve the 2005/06 target and is planning ways of increasing recycling rates. The council estimate that this will ensure they reach its 18 per cent target.

186 There has been limited enforcement and education work and preventative measures. Work has been limited to a trial borough wide enforcement on dog fouling. This has generated ten enforcement actions. Methods of extending this to littering and fly-tipping are currently being examined. Similarly the council are examining how they can effectively deal with fly-tipping on private land. No education work is currently undertaken in these areas.

187 The borough is currently visibly clean and tidy. The council’s performance in street scene was weak and its street scene contract was outsourced in January 2004, integrating waste and recycling collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance to provide a seamless approach. In 2000/01 only 42 per cent of local residents were satisfied with cleanliness levels, which put the council in the bottom quartile. However residents are already reporting an improvement and a survey undertaken between April and June 2004 shows an increase to 53 per cent. Performance against new national performance indicators for surface
Improvements to speed of removal of abandoned vehicles have been made and the council achieved 34 day response in June 2004. This is from a low base and further improvements are planned. The council priority of environment focuses on making Corby a clean, tidy and attractive place and sets out a number of projects to achieve this. A response team has been set up to visit identified hotspots daily plus deal with fly-tipping and reported dog fouling. The new contract focuses regular litter picking on the gateways to the town. A ‘blitz’ clean over a six month period has been undertaken and additional litter bins fitted. Through the ‘tidy and mend’ element of the crime and anti-social partnership (CASPAR) project on the Kingswood Estate staff have cleared gardens, fencing, undertaken repairs, painted out graffiti and cleared fly-tipping.

Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?

188 There is a low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.

189 There is a clear vision for improving local community safety, expressed through the community safety strategy 2002/05 which has six key areas for action. This clearly links to the ‘community’ priority within the community strategy with its priority objective of creating a safer environment. It also links to the work of the drug reference group, as well as to the council priority of community. There are still some issues with links to the DAT. A crime and disorder audit was completed during 2001 which included surveys of residents, young people and businesses, focus groups, practitioner interviews and analysis of data. This identified key local issues which along with national issues were translated into the key areas for action. These are being addressed through a range of projects and initiatives. An audit for the next strategy is underway.

190 The council’s contribution to implementing the community safety strategy is clear and where they are leading on actions they are resulting in improvements. The supporting 23 work plans state the lead agency and individual for each action. For example the CASPAR project work plan gives objectives, lead officer, actions to achieve these plus timescale. Those led by the council have resulted in improvements to the appearance of the area.

191 The council is working effectively with partners to improve community safety. Representation and engagement of partners in the community safety partnership is strong. Partners value the council’s contribution. Resources are being pooled within the partnership. Six police community support officers are partly funded by the council, equivalent of two posts; joint funding between the council and police funds the principal community safety officer who is responsible for co-ordinating the work of the partnership, and resources have been pooled with Kettering Borough Council to fund two anti-social behaviour officers to be based within the anti-social behaviour team. The council jointly support a mediation service with the Home Office and ODPM. There are a range of joint initiatives and projects.

192 The community safety partnership is addressing fear of crime through a range of work. This is being done through a range of measures under its priority of creating a safer environment including publicising anti-social behaviour work, introducing new street lighting, improving CCTV, supporting ‘Neighbourhood Watch’, target hardening and provision of alarms for vulnerable people. A baseline figure for fear of crime during day and night is currently being identified through consultation. Five acceptable behaviour contracts have been issued, five
anti-social behaviour orders, six notices to tenants and two evictions. Targeted work is being undertaken through the CASPAR project on the Kingswood Estate and through the police designating it as a policing priority area.

193 Clear benefits from its community safety work can be demonstrated with an annual review of the second community safety strategy completed. Domestic surveys and security upgrades have been given to 300 burglary repeat victims and vulnerable people living in burglary hotspots. 370 vulnerable, elderly or disabled persons have received distraction burglary locks paid for and installed. However, domestic burglary rates increased by 1.4 per cent in 2003/04, (unaudited figures). 2,500 arrests are attributable to the council’s CCTV cameras to end June 2004. Additional lighting has been installed on the Kingswood Estate. A range of other work is ongoing, including diversionary work with young people, improving the local environment, therefore reducing opportunities for arson, and work with drug related offenders prior to release from prison.

194 The council does not have systems to evaluate the impact of the previous or current community safety strategies. The strategy does not include targets, making it difficult to identify clear benefits and impact. Within the work plans outcomes and performance measures are not identified. An annual assessment and review of the work of the partnership is undertaken and an annual report produced. This identifies examples of work and achievements under the six key areas for action. For example in 2003/04, 2,000 new hate crime packs were designed and distributed. As there was no target set it is difficult to assess if this is a success or the impact of this work on crime statistics. It is not clear if the objectives and targets of the first community safety strategy were achieved.

195 Crime figures for 2002/03 are high within the borough and the trend is a worsening one when compared to the Home Office family group. The council is in best quartile for domestic burglaries, although numbers have worsened between 2000/01 and 2002/03. The council has remained in third quartile for robberies and violence against the person, although numbers have worsened between 2000/01 and 2002/03. Performance has declined in theft of motor vehicles moving from second to third quartile between 2000/01 and 2002/03; in theft from motor vehicles moving from top to second quartile; and sexual offences moving from top to bottom quartile. Domestic violence places have remained in bottom quartile. Overall the number of offences is rising.

196 The council has not yet fully mainstreamed community safety. An audit was completed to see how effectively it is mainstreaming crime and disorder across services as required under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, but this was over four years ago. Community safety is incorporated into the daily work of some services including development control; for example, through planning out crime. It is not clear how fully community safety is mainstreamed elsewhere with no recent assessment of mainstreaming taking place. Training is in place with 228 staff having attended training on the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 since October 2003. Also induction training includes a community safety element and raises awareness of how community safety issues should be incorporated in all work. Committee reports and business plans include a section on community safety implications. Until an audit has been completed it is not clear what impact this training and inclusion in reports is having.
Does the council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?

197 There is a very low risk of service or function failure and/or poor outcomes.

198 The council has a clear idea about the needs of some of its young people. A single survey of local needs has not been undertaken; instead the approach of working with young people at a local level and on specific projects is employed. Plus an open day was held at the Willow Arts Centre to get feedback. Evaluations of activities are undertaken and the results are fed into the planning of future activities. For example, the need for more arts activities has resulted in additional arts activities and projects being developed. An arts strategy and leisure strategy have been developed and a play strategy is being developed.

199 A wide range of activities for young people are provided. Many of these are facilitated by the council and delivered by professional coaches, art performers and others using external funding. Activities are also delivered by the county council through their youth service, by the YOT and by Connexions. Summer activities include dance, sport aimed at girls as well as boys, arts and visits programme. 2,652 young people attended the activities in 2003, compared to 1,729 the year before. Funding for activities is from a range of agencies. For example, the ‘Happenin’ Project’ is funded by the Children’s Fund and Home Office Recovered Assets Fund. Heritage Lottery funding of £94,243 to develop a three year arts based project for 9-19 year olds has been awarded.

200 Activities are delivered effectively in partnership. The Corby and Kettering Youth Music Action Zone, spanning the two boroughs, is now well established as ‘Big About Music’ enabling many music development projects within the borough. The ‘Happenin’ Project’ aims to reduce anti-social behaviour, crime, drug and alcohol misuse and involves 300 young people aged 9-13 in recreational activities. This partnership of organisations includes the council, YOT, police, Surestart, Primary Healthcare Trust and federation of residents and tenants.

201 Activities for young people are effectively promoted. They are advertised using booklets delivered to young people at school, via local media and via partners. Young people in deprived areas are targeted.

202 The council is effectively communicating to the most difficult to reach young people. Specific consultation was carried out in 2002 with young people from the most deprived estate in the borough. Much of the work undertaken by the ‘Happenin’ Project’ focuses on disadvantaged young people on the estates. The community and culture department are currently undertaking non-user surveys of their sports facilities and have identified and contacted local East European communities which have resulted in them running sports activities for their communities. A local culture show is being developed with young people which will include contributions from local Asian and Croatian young people.

203 Activities and facilities are offered in a range of locations, although the main focus is in the town. The summer play scheme is held in five villages as well as in a number of town locations. Activities are offered at low cost, for example 50 pence per session for ‘Happenin’ Project’, and at different times of day and in a range of locations including community centres and village halls. There are a number of play areas within the borough. The one in Rockingham has recently had new equipment following extensive consultation. There is a skateboard ramp at
Weldon and central skate/BMX park at Rockingham Motor Speedway. The Rockingham facility, Adrenalin Alley, is accessible to young people across the borough through free buses financed by the council.

The council has an overarching child protection policy in place. This has been in place since February 2004 and developed using the Institute of Sport and Recreation Management (ISRM) Child Protection Policy Guidelines for sport and recreation providers and with reference to Northamptonshire Sport ‘ensuring the safety of young people’. It is used primarily within the community and culture department but is now being rolled out across the council. Criminal Records Bureau checks are made on staff, volunteers, coaches and hirers of council buildings. Training has been undertaken for all staff working directly with children and volunteers working within devolved facilities. All jobs are risk assessed where there is contact with children. Procedure manuals are issued to all staff, volunteers, coaches and hirers. Further training is planned for councillors and for staff who are not directly involved with children.
## Summary of public space diagnostic assessment judgements and strengths / weaknesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of focus</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How well does the council contribute to the management of the physical environment?</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>• Positive relationships with developers                                                     • Slow to meet DDA responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Planning indicators – above average in 02/03                                                • Planning response times mixed and decline in some PIs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Slow to meet DDA responsibilities                                                             • Slow standard searches</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Planning response times mixed and decline in some PIs                                        • Reliance on reactive rather than planned maintenance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Slow standard searches                                                                           • Poor out of hours service for nuisances</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the council help keep the locality clean?</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>• Likely to meet statutory recycling targets for 2005/06                                        • Limited waste minimisation and education work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Widespread recycling service                                                                   • Didn’t meet statutory recycling targets for 2003/04</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Public spaces are now visibly clean and tidy                                                  • Limited education and enforcement actions re. cleanliness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Amount of waste collected between 2002/03 and 2003/04 fell (unaudited)                         • Poor satisfaction with waste service, recycling, cleanliness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the council work with partners to improve community safety?</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>• Clear understanding of main community safety issues                                            • Impact of previous or current community safety strategy is unclear</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Alignment between community safety and community strategy                                     • Section 17 not fully mainstreamed</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Partners value council’s contribution to partnership and effective joint working               • Performance weak compared to Home Office family</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Range of initiatives and projects in place                                                    •</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Resources pooled to fund posts and initiatives                                                •</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>• General understanding of young peoples needs                                                   •</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Wide range of activities                                                                        •</td>
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<td>• Evaluation of activities                                                                       •</td>
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<td>• Cost, timing &amp; location of activities appropriate                                              •</td>
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<td>• Effective promotion leaflets, newspaper etc                                                    •</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Adequate child protection policy                                                               •</td>
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</table>

### Scoring key

For each of the key areas looked at within the diagnostic assessments the need for improvement, based upon the risk of service failure and poor outcomes, is identified using the following scale.

- a = very low
- b = low
- c = high
- d = very high
### Appendix 3 - Appointed auditor assessment

Appointed auditors are asked to score five areas which relate to the statutory code of audit practice. When scoring each area a range of issues are taken into account. These issues and the score that has been given in each area are set out in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area for auditor judgement</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Issues included in this area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial standing</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Setting a balanced budget</td>
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<td>Setting a capital programme</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Financial monitoring and reporting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Meeting financial targets</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Systems of internal financial control</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Monitoring of financial systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>An adequate internal audit function is maintained</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk identification and management</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Standards of financial conduct and the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ethical framework</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Governance arrangements</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Treasury management</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prevention and detection of fraud and corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial statements</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Timeliness</td>
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**Scoring key**

1 = inadequate
2 = adequate overall, but some weaknesses that need to be addressed
3 = adequate
4 = good
Appendix 4 - Benefit Fraud Inspectorate assessment

206 The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) has undertaken the assessment in this appendix as part of the CPA process. The assessment covers two aspects, the current level of performance and the council’s proven capacity to improve. Each assessment is measured on a five-point scale (poor, fair, fair to good, good and excellent).

Summary

Current performance

207 Overall, we found that Corby Borough Council’s HB and CTB service is providing a **Fair** performance. Corby Borough Council’s current performance demonstrates a number of strengths. These include:

- a documented plan for HB/CTB administration with objectives for continuous improvement in its service delivery
- a range of counter-fraud policies and a code of conduct for employees and Councillors
- a clear and accessible HB and CTB claim form that meets standard
- a service that is Verification Framework compliant
- a full range of sanctions is used against fraudsters
- the creation of a Corporate Debt Recovery team to increase the focus on debt recovery, improve the percentage of debt recovered and take a tough stance on those unwilling to repay.

208 However, there are some areas where Corby Borough Council needs to develop further to fully meet the BFI and Department for Work and Pensions’ (the Department’s) Performance Standards framework. These include:

- producing a vision and statement of intent for the Benefits service
- documenting all of the HB and CTB procedures in manuals that include the relevant regulations and circulars
- monitoring of customer waiting times for personal and telephone callers
- improving the speed of processing of new claims
- holding private landlords forums
- reviewing procedures for vetting staff to ensure that they are at least equal to those recommended by the Audit Commission
- improving the percentage of overpayments recovered so that it is at least the same as top performing authorities
making regular reports to Councillors on the age and level of outstanding debt.

**Proven capacity to improve**

209 We assessed Corby Borough Council’s proven capacity to improve as Fair towards Good. The council acknowledged that past performance has been poor and it has made concerted efforts to implement change. Corby Borough Council was able to demonstrate the following positive aspects:

- willingness to invest in the service to improve systems and increase staffing levels
- introduction of Performance Improvement clinics to establish reasons for poor performance and to create action plans for improvement
- the Benefits section has undertaken two self assessments against Performance Standards, the second assessment shows a 14 per cent improvement in standards achieved. An action plan has been developed with a target of 100 per cent compliance by April 2005.
- commitment to work in partnership with others.

210 However, the following areas led us to question the extent to which Corby Borough Council was able to prove its capacity to improve:

- there is no vision for the Benefits Service
- past performance has been affected by high levels of staff sick absence. However, there is now a process to monitor the level of sickness and the Finance Management Team meetings include a standing agenda item to address the problem and seek proactive solutions
- difficulties with the retention of experienced staff over a number of years, although there has been some improvement of late within the Benefits section. Only one councillor of staff has left to move on to alternative employment during the past twelve months
- failure to meet targets for processing new claims and changes of circumstances.

211 This report has been produced pursuant to powers contained in sections 10 and 11 of the Local Government Act 1999.
Appendix 5 - Framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment

212 This comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999. Local councils have a general duty under Section 3 of this Act to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions. Section 10 gives the Audit Commission the power to inspect councils’ performance of the general duty of improvement.

213 The main elements of the assessment were:

- a self-assessment completed by the council;
- accredited peer challenge to inform the council’s self-assessment;
- a corporate assessment of the council’s overall effectiveness in supporting services to deliver improvements;
- an assessment of the council’s service delivery performance through two diagnostic assessments on:
  - management of public space;
  - progress in meeting the decent homes standard;
  - Benefit Fraud Inspectorate’s (BFI) assessment of benefit services;
- appointed auditor assessments of performance on each of the main elements of the code of audit practice; and
- audited performance indicators, inspection reports and plan assessments.

214 The assessment for Corby Borough Council was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 12th July 2004 to 16th July 2004.

215 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.