

DRAFT DOT SELF ASSESSMENT
25th OCTOBER 2005 - Blaby District Council

SETTING THE SCENE

Blaby District Council continues to have bold aspirations as demonstrated by its vision of **leading the communities of the District of Blaby towards an improving quality of life**. The Council policy driven, with clear long term ambitions, informed by a good understanding of the needs of residents and underpinned by an innovative approach to getting things done and a successful record of tackling change. It is now making real progress to becoming recognised by residents as **the** major community resource in the area, consistently delivering services that add to the quality of their lives.

There have been significant changes since the CPA Inspection in May 2004. These include the appointments of a new Chief Executive and Strategic Director, changes to the membership and roles of the Cabinet Executive and the development of a Local Area Agreement for the County. The Council has added to its track record of delivering improvements and has taken some bold decisions to increase capacity in key areas to build on the momentum of improvement.

The Council's Corporate Plan translates the vision into aims and objectives implemented through a practical and pragmatic programme of annual "critical activities". The Council holds itself publicly accountable and monitors its success in delivering these objectives and critical activities¹.

The priorities and needs of Blaby residents are measured by regular surveys. The most recent carried out in autumn 2004, is being used to refresh the Corporate Plan and ensure that the Council's main priorities as set out continue to be relevant². The draft refreshed version clearly demonstrates the continuing ambitions of the Council to 2010 and highlights the Council's maturing approach/ambition to community leadership.

The Council is determined to deliver change and improvement in a sustainable and cost effective way for the long term benefit of local people rather than adopting a "quick fix" approach. A good start has been made on implementing the Council's CPA Improvement Plan³ and addressing identified weaknesses. The Council has identified benefits, housing, and planning, as services where improvements in outcomes are a priority and its ongoing investment in these areas is now showing very positive results.

This document demonstrates the progress that has been made in delivering improvement plans and highlights how the Council is improving outcomes for local people. It is structured mainly around the headings as set out in the Council's CPA Improvement Plan and complements the Council's self assessment on Use of Resources and Value for Money.

MANAGING ASSETS AND INVESTMENT

Achieving Decent Homes

Delivery of Improvement Plans

A strong corporate approach to delivering step change improvement in its housing services is demonstrated by its investment and focus on housing since 2004.

The Council completed its Stock Option Appraisal (SOA) in June 2005 and decided to transfer its housing stock to a Registered Social Landlord (RSL). This will enable the stock to be improved to the "Blaby Standard" (higher than the Decent Homes Standard) and deliver the Council's commitment to high quality housing that meets the wishes of its tenants'.

This was a very difficult decision for the Council as negative stock valuation will require the Council to reduce its ongoing revenue expenditure significantly before transfer⁴. The transfer is being overseen by a group of tenants, members and officers⁵. This group is looking at a range of options to manage the change, minimising the impacts on the general fund and maximising early improvements to the service and stock valuation.

An asset database is now in place, building on the information from the 2004 Stock Condition Survey, to monitor and track progress towards achieving the Decent Homes Standard (DHS). Based on this information, investment plans have been drawn up and capital expenditure is prioritised towards meeting the DHS⁶. The Council is determined to deliver an improved, effective and efficient repairs and maintenance service and Best Value Review is underway.

Building on the tenant empowerment and involvement stimulated by the SOA and housing improvement processes, tenants are centrally involved in decision making, service development and improvement. A new Tenants Compact⁷ has been developed covering all landlord services and the Blaby District Tenant's Federation has been formally constituted and will receive an independent budget from 2006/07.

The 2005 Housing Needs and Markets Study identified a net annual affordable housing requirement of 228 which is a major challenge. The Council is now considering revisions to planning policy in order to achieve more affordable housing.

In full consultation with partners, the Council developed a new Housing Strategy. Following feedback from GOEM in October, a full final draft will be submitted on 25th November.

The Council negotiates with developers for affordable housing and community facilities to ensure sustainable communities and has regular liaison with local RSLs and the Housing Corporation. The enabling role is used effectively to identify sites and ensure schemes are delivered. 83 units of affordable housing are expected to be delivered in the period 2004/5/06.

Improved Outcomes

Examples of recent achievements include the Blaby Void Standard (and tenant /officer void monitoring), agreed priorities for community safety works (Safe as Houses), capital programme works, improved procurement of windows/doors/gas and electrical works and changes to allocations⁸.

Since April 2005 there have been improvements in the management of void properties, average relet times, and average length of stay in homelessness temporary accommodation⁹. Improved procedures have also been agreed to ensure all RSLs are meeting a minimum 50% target for Council nominations to true voids.

Investment totalling £3,179,000 has been secured from the Housing Corporation to support the development of affordable housing for 2004/5/6 in conjunction with local RSLs.

Delivering Modern Procurement Through Partnerships and Collaboration ***Delivery of Improvement Plans***

To deliver efficiency gains and service improvements the Council has;

- a clear Procurement Strategy¹⁰
- invested in increased capacity through a new post of Contracts and Procurement Manager.
- progressed joint inter-authority procurement projects through the Leicestershire Chief Executives Group
- secured funding for a range of procurement activity from the Regional Centre of Excellence and ODPM
- a partnership approach to bulk procurement in place for some housing contracts.

The Council has invested heavily in major procurement activity during 2005. A new contract will be in place by January 2006 for the delivery of leisure and golf services and a final decision on the provision of Customer Relationship Management, Work Flow and Document Image Processing systems will be made in December 2005, to support the delivery of the Council's vision for Customer Services.

Improved Outcomes

The new leisure contract will generate £1.3m new capital investment in the Council's main leisure facility, reduce the Council's ongoing asset liability and provide a revenue contribution to the Council.

Developing Future Leaders ***Delivery of Improvement Plans***

The Council is a driving force in the Leicestershire and Rutland Improvement Partnership (LRIP), which has secured £750,000 capacity building funding from the ODPM to deliver excellence in management, member development and performance management.

A revised management and service delivery structure is being implemented to ensure that the Council has the right skills and resources to deliver its ambitions. This will increase the Council's capacity in performance and organisational development, as well as within certain key frontline services¹¹.

Improved Outcomes

A Member Development Steering Group has been set up and a comprehensive Training Needs Assessment completed for councillors. This will inform future training and development programmes¹².

Led by Blaby, the LRIPartnership has;

- adopted common Management Competencies across all LRIP Councils
- a partnership in place with Jobsgopublic to deliver a cost effective web based method for training needs assessment, across all managers in the partnership¹³.

Councillors at Blaby have hosted and supported learning events for other Councils on Scrutiny.

MANAGING PERFORMANCE

Improving Services

Delivery of Improvement Plans

The Council continues to strengthen its service improvement and performance management capacity and arrangements;

- The recent implementation of a new bespoke performance management software system now enables corporate performance to be tracked at a number of levels including regular reports to the Scrutiny Commission and quarterly monitoring of key BVPI's at Management Team and Cabinet¹⁴. The system will be developed further over the next 12 months to complement the work of the LRIP and include a wider range of local performance information.
- The "Customer First" programme being implemented as part of the wider IEG initiative, is a major change programme for the Council¹⁵.
- The Council is working with Vanguard, a private sector company specialising in "Systems Thinking", to reengineer key systems and develop capacity to change ways of working to further improve customer service and performance¹⁶.

The Council has a clear vision for its customers, service standards which are being tested out as part of a Customer Views week (week commencing 31st October 2005) and a commitment to reshape the structure of the Council to put customer service staff centre stage¹⁷.

Improved Outcomes

Areas with a strong historical record such as waste services and community safety have continued to improve, whilst investment in areas such as planning, benefits and housing, where performance has previously been weaker is now delivering significant improvement;

- In January 2005, assisted by DEFRA funding of £870,000, the Council totally restructured its waste recycling and refuse collection service and successfully expanded the kerbside recycling service using innovative communication methods.

This service continues to improve in terms of BVPI and customer satisfaction (reduction in missed bins etc), whilst at the same time the relative costs of the service are decreasing¹⁸.

- Planning was the top performing service in terms of BVPI improvement in 2004/05, with Development Control BVPI's all meeting or exceeding the national targets in the first half of 2005/06. This will help lever in further resources through Planning Delivery Grant in 2006/07 for further investment in services.
- Benefits 2004/05 key BVPI performance exceeded national targets and continues to improve.
- Housing improvements have been referred to above¹⁹.
- During 2004/05 district cleansing operations were reorganised and additional resources invested. This has resulted in continuing reductions in response times for fly tipping and abandoned vehicles.
- The performance of the Council's basket of PIs has exceeded the targets agreed in the PSA and will secure a financial reward for the Council.

During recent times a range of new services and ways of working with partners has been introduced including - the establishment of a "Customer First" team to improve front-line services to customers, the new licensing regime, the opening of a Citizens Advice Bureau at the Council's Blaby Joint Service Shop and outreach surgeries, the delivery of new Civil Contingency responsibilities through the Local Resilience Forum, the introduction of Parish and Town Council seminars and the opening of the "Connect" Joint Service Shop in Braunstone. The latter is part of the County wide Better Access to Better Services Initiative (BABS) and an example of a different approach to accessing services. The Council has entered into partnership with Braunstone Town Council who are now delivering access to the Town, District and County Councils services through a service level agreement and partnership support on IT solutions²⁰.

The Council has secured £1.5m funding through S106 Agreements for investment in community, education, open space and health facilities at Thorpe Astley.

Technology is being used to further improve access and services. For example;

- In April 2005 a digital telephone payment line was introduced. Payments made through it already amount to more than £400,000 in addition to kiosk based payments.
- In partnership with other Leicestershire authorities, the Council has implemented its Planning on-line system, enabling customers to both submit and view planning applications on-line.
- A web based grants package (Blaby 4 Community) is available on line to support community and neighbourhood groups' access funding to deliver community benefits.

Managing Staff

Delivery of Improvement Plans

A Best Value Review of the Councils approach to Human Resources was completed in December 2004. This has set out clear priorities for improvement which the current management and service restructure will help deliver.

The Workforce Development Reviews (WDR) system implemented in June 2004 seeks to translate high level priorities and service plans into individual objectives for all staff, thus completing the performance management “loop”. The WDR system was reviewed in April 2005 and work is being carried out to address an identified weakness in individual target and objective setting.

Bi-annual Awaydays are held with Heads of Service and Service Managers to embed the new culture and develop corporate capacity for improvement²¹.

Improved Outcomes

Scrutiny instigated work to review how staff attendance could be improved. This led to Cabinet Executive agreeing a revised absence management policy. Improvements have been particularly apparent in the days lost through sickness absence since April 2004. A range of support is provided to staff to promote better health, including smoking cessation, yoga, and access to counselling.

A Service Managers Group was established in December 2004, to improve communication and middle managers involvement in shaping and challenging improvements alongside senior managers. Through this group, a set of “Blaby Management Must Do’s” have been agreed and shared with staff. This helps close the loop and ensure best practice is uniform across the Council. Delivery against the “Blaby Management Must Do’s” is being monitored as part of the interactive staff consultation exercise in November²².

The Chief Executive continues to meet regularly and informally with a group of frontline staff at a monthly Sounding Board. Outcomes over recent months include the provision of water coolers, smoking cessation support, the introduction of an annual “Tidy Up Tuesday” event to improve the quality of the working environment, choice of internal decoration colours, organisation of fundraising events and improvement of information to staff through the intranet.

Outcomes from Partnerships

Delivery of Improvement Plans

The profile and performance of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Community Plan has been raised this year primarily through a series of consultation events and the development of the Leicestershire Local Area Agreement. A revised Community Plan was produced in December 2004, with associated press releases and consultation postcards²³.

The LSP is currently reviewing the voluntary sector compact .

Performance management and monitoring procedures are being developed for the LSP’s activities, in a way which complements the county wide LSP and emerging structures for the Local Area Agreement²⁴.

Over the past twelve months the Blaby Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (BCDRP) has increasingly worked within the strategic direction of the Community Safety Programme Board, chaired by the Chief Constable. This has demonstrated how strategic (eg. work with prolific offenders) and local issues (eg anti-social behaviour) can be developed in a cohesive way.

The BCDRP agreed its new Crime Reduction Strategy in May 2005 and active Community Safety Partnership Theme Groups are now effective in targeting action at identified crime and antisocial behaviour hotspots.

The Council has played a lead role in the review and improvement of partnership working across the Leicestershire Authorities, under the ambit of the LRIP and the District Chief Executives Group. A structure for the partnership has been agreed so that resources and expertise are shared across the county in a strategic way²⁵.

The Council jointly funds a senior manager's post, employed by the South Leicestershire Primary Care Trust, whose work contributes to the development of the LSP, implementation of the Community Plan health agendas and interagency planning, around issues such as the provision of primary care health facilities²⁶. The postholder is part of the Council's Senior Management Team.

Improved Outcomes

Recent outcomes from partnership working include:

- 3 Family Feel Good Fair events held as part of National Family Learning Week October 2004 attended by over 250 people, evaluation report available.
- Successful Cook and Eat pilot targeting South Asian Community in Braunstone Town which led to funds secured from the Learning Partnership to extend the number of cook and eat initiatives.
- SLPCT Intermediate Care Scheme – Referrals to support structures to vulnerable adults in Blaby District.
- Joint funding (BDC and SLPCT) of the Blaby Active Lifestyle Scheme and Phase 4 Cardiac Rehabilitations Programme.
- Engagement of the Council in determining the future premises requirements for the SLPCT.
- Funding identified for a post to work with the Anti Social Behaviour team and the Youth Service to tackle issues to do with young people at greatest risk of antisocial behaviour.
- Supporting a local entry to the national Together Taking a Stand Award (prize winner).
- Establishing a Countywide Prolific Offenders Project,
- Pubwatch, Shopwatch,
- Sensitive and joined up use of dispersal orders, responses to anti-social behaviour and drinking bans in public places
- Securing funding for a BMX track at Huncote Leisure Centre
- Establishing the Blaby CAB and outreach service
- Appointing a Waste Management Partnership Manager
- Opening the Connect Joint Services Shop in Braunstone
- Securing funding and supporting a Farmers Market in Blaby Town Centre

IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY
Improving Access to Services
Delivery of Improvement Plans

A Customer Services Manager was appointed in January 2005, to play a lead role in the development of the Council's "Customer First" programme and further develop service standards across the authority.

The Council has recently introduced a Customer Views Week to better understand customer's preferences, concerns and opinions.

Councillors, staff and Parish/Town Council partners have all been involved in developing the Councils vision for Customer Services²⁷.

Improved Outcomes

The Council has made good progress in terms of improving access to services, particularly for young people, where it is seeking to expand services whilst at the same time developing a seamless approach to provision. This stems from the work of the LSP Youth Theme Group. Examples of recent work specifically aimed at young people includes - a football tournament and fun day at Huncote Leisure Centre organised during the summer, resources identified for a youth bus as part of a capital allocation for next year, funding obtained from SITA for a BMX site at Huncote Leisure Centre.

Following a feasibility study into the development potential of Huncote Leisure Centre as a centre for young people, a bid has been made through the LSEP, to develop Huncote Leisure Centre as an Access Centre. The outcome of the latter bid will not be known until late March²⁸.

Other outcomes from the Councils focus on improving access to services include:

- The Connect Service Shop at Braunstone
- Introduction of direct debit payments for rents
- Sports events for disabled young people
- Opening of Blaby CAB with surgeries across the District
- Planning online
- Introduction of a Housing Hotline service

Consulting with the wider community
Delivery of Improvement Plans

The Council continues to use a range of means to consult with its residents. This includes a regular Residents Survey, work alongside the Tenants Federation, the Customer Views Week and the involvement of staff in developing new ideas

Good progress has also been made in developing the Councils understanding of the needs and priorities of young people as evidenced by the following examples of recent activity:

- As part of the LSP consultation programme a one day “I’m a Councillor Get me out of here!” event was held In February 2005 specifically aimed at facilitating elected member consultation with young people in the District. The event, attended by over 50 young people, culminated in the appointment by young people of a member “youth champion” to act as their advocate across the Council²⁹.
- There is a Young Persons Strategic Officer Group to work with the Youth champion to deliver an events programme for young people around youth democracy and inclusion.
- Young people were consulted on the themes of this year’s Community Plan, and this will become an annual exercise of the LSP’s Youth Theme Group.
- Responses from young people were encouraging in relation to the Local Development Framework Young Persons Issues Paper³⁰.

The Council’s partnership working with Parish and Towns Councils has developed apace during 2004/5. Three seminars have been held since September 2004 on topics of importance to the Parish and Town Councils and all first tier Councils provided with comprehensive information resource to help them access and work with Blaby District Council to the benefit of local people.

As part of the Housing Needs Survey, a focus group was held with black and ethnic minority residents, to better understand their housing needs

Improved Outcomes

Recent examples of improved services flowing from this work include:

- Narborough Youth Shelter Consultation and Design
- Braunstone Connect Service Shop
- Funding for a BMX track at Huncote
- Adoption of Community Cohesion Indicators³¹
- Tenants Compact

Conclusion

The past year has seen a quickening of the pace of change and improvement and strengthening of ambition at Blaby District Council. Substantial progress has been made by the Council to address the weaknesses identified through the CPA inspection in 2004 and to respond to new challenges and service requirements.

Improvements continue to be made across the range of the Council’s services. The BVPI performance figures show that overall, the Council’s performance is above the English council average and improving year on year.

The (IEG) Customer First and Productivity Programmes and the externalisation of the Housing landlord services through LSVT represent major change programmes and resource challenges for a Council which was, for many years, the lowest grant funded in England.

It is perhaps not surprising that the last 3 years has been one of sustained organisational change for the Council. This process continues with a further reshaping of the Council's management and staffing structure now underway, designed to support service change and increase capacity in priority areas. The proposals include combining enforcement and regulatory functions in a single Division and taking the first step towards a fundamental restructuring of customer contact arrangements.

This Direction of Travel self assessment demonstrates how the Council is committed to improving the delivery of quality services and outcomes within a sound financial framework, in a manner which achieves value for money by making the most effective use of limited resources. This latter point is evidenced by both the low net overall cost of services and level of per head external funding, relative to other shire districts

¹ Corporate Plan Delivery Report – Acting Chief Executive – Cabinet 29/4/05

² Refreshing the Corporate Plan Report – Chief Executive – Cabinet 19/8/05,
Developing New Critical Activities

³ CPA Improvement Plan Monitoring Report for Q3 (July to September) – Corporate Performance Officer –
Management Team 1/11/05

⁴ Housing Stock Valuation – Price Waterhouse Cooper Report
Delivery of Stock Option Appraisal Report - Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive & Acting Head of
Housing - Cabinet 16/9/05

⁵ Evidence Report Setting up Transfer Group for Housing Stock Transfer

⁶ Housing 5 year Capital Programme

⁷ Tenants Participation Compact 2005

⁸ Blaby Void Standard

Safe as Houses

Procurement improvements

Changes to allocations

⁹ Housing Performance Indicator Table

¹⁰ Procurement Strategy

¹¹ Revised Management and Staffing Arrangements Report – Chief Executive – Cabinet 11/11/05

¹² Member Development and Training Needs Assessment – October 2004

¹³ The Leicestershire & Rutland Improvement Partnership – Management Competencies – Chief Executive –
Cabinet 16/9/05

LRIP Final Version Management Competency Framework with LCC ack
050928Jobsgopublic LRIP Proposal

¹⁴ Performance of Key BVPIs for July-September 2005 (Quarter 2) Report – Corporate Performance Officer
– Cabinet 11/11/05

¹⁵ Council Structure Customer Focus Report – Acting Chief Executive – Cabinet 12/11/04
Proposals for Implementing e-government and Delivery of Priority Services Outcomes Report – Acting
Strategic Director – Cabinet 29/4/05

¹⁶ Improving Customer Service Report – Strategic Director – Cabinet 7/10/05

¹⁷ The Vision for the Customer Journey

Overview of Customer Views Week

¹⁸ Amended Report on Costs and Performance of Waste Recycling and Refuse – Strategic Director -
Strategic Board

Blaby District Council DVD – Talking Rubbish, Making Sense & Blaby Chronicle Autumn
2004

¹⁹ BVPI Table for Planning, Housing and Benefits

²⁰ Draft Service Level Agreement with Braunstone Town Council

²¹ Managers Away Days – Programmes – Dec 04/Jun 05/Dec 05

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- ²² Blaby 'Management Must Do's'
Staff Consultation Plans and Survey Questions
- ²³ Community Plan – December 2004
- ²⁴ Local Strategic Partnership – self-assessment & Table of structure
- ²⁵ LRIP Structure Chart
Model A – Acting as a 'lead' Chief Executive
- ²⁶ South Leicestershire Primary Care Trust Strategic Service Development Plan – 'Fitting future services and premises together' Report – Head of Planning and Development Services - Cabinet 7/10/05
- ²⁷ Vision for Customer Services – evidence from member and staff session
Evidence from Parish Seminar
- ²⁸ Huncote Leisure Centre – Access Centre Feasibility Study
- ²⁹ 'I'm a Councillor Get Me Out of Here!' event – programme
- ³⁰ Local Development Framework – Young Persons Issues Paper - consultation and responses
- ³¹ Community Cohesion Indicators Report – Head of Community Development – Community Cohesion Scrutiny Panel - 28 June 05