

Broxbourne  
Borough Council

**Best Value  
Performance  
Plan  
2004/05**



June 2004



## Best Value Performance Plan 2004/05

---

### Contents

	Foreword .....	page 3
1	Introduction .....	page 5
2	The Objective Setting Process and Improvement Planning .....	page 5
	- A Community Strategy for Broxbourne and its role in Performance Planning	
3	An Overview of Performance in 2003/04 .....	page 13
	- The Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2004	
	- Other measures of Council Performance in 2003/04	
	- Surveys of Residents' Views during 2003/04	
	- Best Value Reviews 2003/04	
4	Strategic Issues, Actions and Targets for 2004/05 .....	page 20
5	Best Value Programme for 2004/05 and onwards.....	page 22
6	Award of Contracts 2003/04 and 2004/05 .....	page 25
7	Conclusion .....	page 25

### Appendices

- 1 The Council's Mission Statement and Core Values
- 2 The Council's Ambitions
- 3 Public Surveys of Public Attitudes in 2003/04
  - (a) MORI
  - (b) Best Value
- 4 Best Value Programme 1999 to 2005
- 5 Council-wide Plans and Partnerships
- 6 Performance Indicators for Borough Council 2002/03 - 2005/07
- 7 Broxbourne Council CPA 2004 - High Level Action Plan Summary
- 8 Council's Annual Procurement Report for 2003/04 and Schedule of Contracts Valued over £20k p.a.

### List of Figures and Illustrations

- Fig 1 The Borough in Context
- Fig 2 Objective Setting in Broxbourne Council
- Fig 3 Staff Appraisal at Broxbourne Council
- Fig 4 Spidergram summary of Council's CPA Scores
- Fig 5 Summary of Council's weighted CPA Scores
- Fig 6 Best Value General Survey - a good place to live
- Fig 7 Best Value General Survey
- Fig 8 Graphical overview of performance in 2003/04 and previous year



## Foreword

---

The Borough Council has a statutory duty to publish this Performance Plan by 30th June each year. This is the fifth Best Value Performance Plan that the Council has produced and it takes account of statutory requirements and government guidance. A suite of appendices are bound as a separate volume. These include a report on the Council's statutory and local performance indicators.

2003/04 was a significant year for service improvement and external assessment in Broxbourne. In January 2004 the Council was subject to the government's Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The Audit Commission assessed the Council as *a good council that has many of the building blocks for improvement*. The Commission noted that many of the Council's services achieved high levels of satisfaction and that performance is good across a wide range of the Council's services, particularly in priority areas. Areas for improvement were also identified which included clearly articulating long-term ambitions for the Borough, developing the Scrutiny committee, and improving explanations about the service standards provided by the Council. Of the ten Hertfordshire district councils, the Council had the highest numerical score under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The Council is using the assessment to further improve the Council's services to the local community.

This best value performance plan sits at the heart of the business planning processes for the Council. The overarching Community Plan encompasses all the key strategies from key partners operating in the borough. The BVPP is the planning 'glue' which brings together the Council's service and business plans.

Though the contents of this Plan are partly prescribed by the government, the Council would value any comments and suggestions from readers on the Council's proposals for service improvement and development.

**M J Walker**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

---

Chief Executive Officer  
**Broxbourne Borough Council**  
Borough Offices, Bishops' College, Churchgate  
Cheshunt, Herts, EN8 9XQ  
Tel: 01992 785532  
Fax: 01992 626917  
Email: [ceo@broxbourne.gov.uk](mailto:ceo@broxbourne.gov.uk)  
[www.broxbourne.gov.uk](http://www.broxbourne.gov.uk)



## Introduction

### 1 Introduction

This Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) for Broxbourne Borough Council for 2004/2005 has been produced in compliance with Section 5.6 of the Local Government Act 1999. The plan describes the Council's work during 2003/04, and how it plans to improve services to local residents in 2004/2005 and beyond.

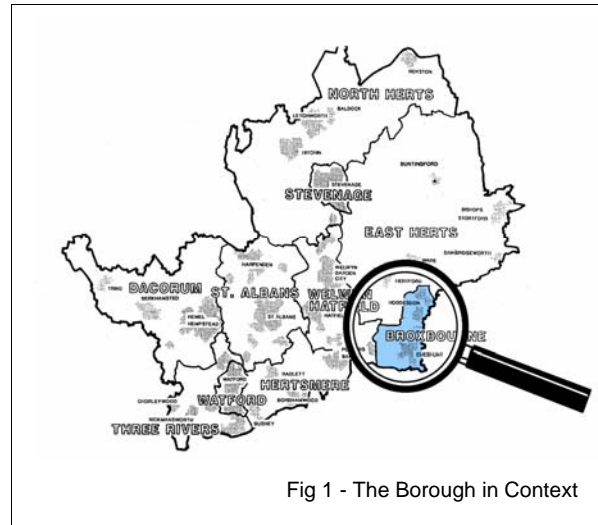


Fig 1 - The Borough in Context

### 2 The Council's Objective Setting Process

The Council's mission statement and core values are set out in Appendix 1. To keep its goals and objectives up to date, relevant, challenging and fresh, the Council reviews its key objectives each year. Input to the review of key objectives comes from consultations with residents, from the identification of service developments and national policy agendas and from issues highlighted by best value reviews and inspections. The chart below describes the relationships involved.

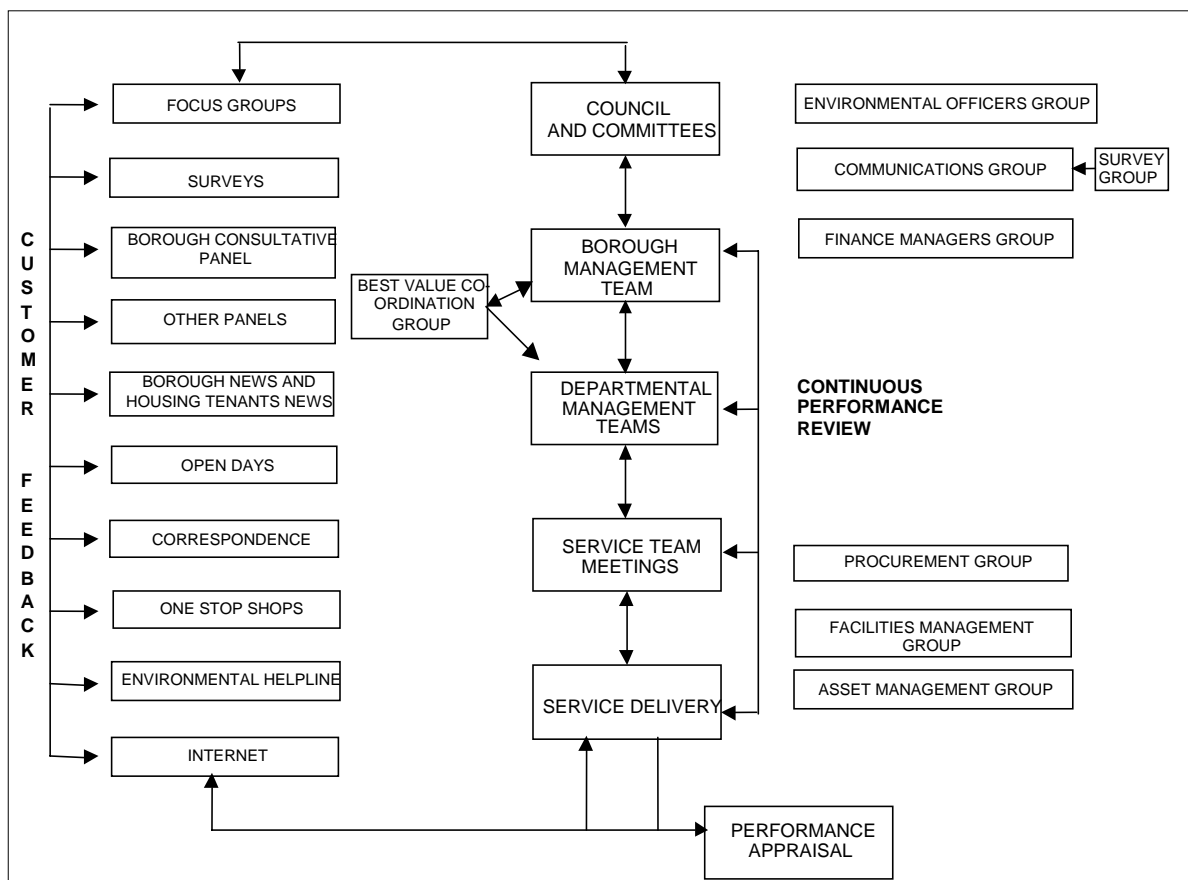


Fig 2 Objective setting in Broxbourne Council. In 2003/04 the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment and surveys of public attitudes provided additional inputs to the process.

However, during the first part of 2004/05 the priorities and longer term vision of the Council are being systematically reviewed in light of the Council's 2003 MORI survey of residents' views, the statutory best value surveys undertaken in the same year and the outcome of the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) which took place in January 2004. The statement of ambition which the Council developed for the performance assessment process is set out at Appendix 2. *Through a series of workshops for members of the Council, staff and stakeholders, the Council proposes to develop a new long term vision for the area and a new set of ambitions and priorities for the Council by November 2004.*

## **Improvement Planning in Broxbourne Council**

Based on the exercise described above, the Council is developing the high level action plan submitted for the Council's comprehensive performance assessment to focus improvements in areas identified by the assessors. This improvement plan builds on the diagnostic reviews and other work submitted as part of the CPA. The following sections describe the principal vehicles by which this statement of vision and ambition and the high level action plan will be implemented over the next few years.

### **(i) Business plans**

The Council produces a comprehensive series of annual service business plans. The Council's five direct service organisations also produce their own individual business plans which are then consolidated into a single document. *During 2004/05, the Council intends to strengthen its business planning process and clarify links with other resource allocation mechanisms such as the allocation of capital resources.* The Council's business plans are:

- *Environmental Services Plan* – development control, building control, environmental health, environmental services.
- *Business plan for housing revenue account* – statutory document covering housing services
- *Leisure business plan* – various client-side leisure services functions
- *Community care business plan* – community alarm service, sheltered housing service, meals services
- *Resources business plan* – accountancy, internal audit, benefit administration, treasury management, insurance
- *Central services business plan* – communication services, computer services, legal services, personnel services, support services
- *Service organisations business plan* – Broxbourne exchequer services, Broxbourne housing services, Broxbourne construction services, Broxbourne leisure management, Broxbourne services.
- *In addition, the Council has identified the strategic need to strengthen business planning for property management and a new property services business plan will be introduced for 2005/06.*

In 2004, the HRA business plan has been assessed as “fit for purpose” by the ODPM.

Each plan includes a clear statement of the service's objectives, which should derive from the Council's overall goals and objectives. Plans set out key issues for 2004/05, the actions and resources that are required to deliver the necessary outcomes and an assessment of the wider environmental issues that will impact upon service delivery. Resources to be used to deliver service plans are identified, including staffing and staff development, revenue budgets and planned capital developments and programmes. Achievements against the previous year's plans and performance measures are summarised and performance targets set for the current year. The service organisations' plans are substantially the same but also focus on their costs and revenue-earning capacity to generate financial surpluses. This includes income generated from external business. The organisations also produce annual trading accounts.

## (ii) **Performance Management Systems**

The CPA concluded that the Borough Council has a well developed framework for monitoring and managing performance. *The Council proposes to continue to develop this framework during 2004/05.* The main elements include:

- Selecting the most relevant performance indicators including best value national indicators and local performance indicators and tracking these in relation to targets set each year
- Publishing regular monitoring reports for the collection of management information
- Receiving feedback from customer and user groups
- Analysing complaints records
- Using staff appraisal as a two-way process of communication
- Benchmarking comparisons and mystery shoppers, with the assistance of other agencies and the voluntary sector
- Feedback from the Council's external auditors in their Annual Letter
- *Strengthening the role of the Council's Scrutiny Committee.*

## **Performance Indicators**

To focus on the Council's key priorities and targets, performance indicators are reviewed by services each year. The aim is to ensure that sound measures, capable of internal and external comparison, are maintained where they will contribute to the Council's objectives and impact beneficially on service effectiveness, and subject these indicators to regular systematic scrutiny via the Scrutiny and service committees of the Council. The Scrutiny Committee has set challenging exception thresholds for indicators which particularly impact on the local community.

## **Basket of “high profile” indicators**

A Council wide basket of key performance indicators have been chosen to reflect significant management issues, for example staff sickness, but also to be

understandable and meaningful to local residents. These are tracked through regular officer group meetings and reported to residents. The basket is shown below. Changes to indicator definitions, deletions and additions to national indicators have affected the tracking of performance over time. Where indicators that have made a valuable contribution to management are deleted from national requirements, the Council has maintained them locally.

### The Council's Selected "High Profile" Indicators

Indicator	2000/01 Performance	2001/02 Performance	2002/03 Performance	2003/04 Performance	2004/05 Target
Percentage of invoices paid within 30 days	85.40%	85.80%	95%	91.6%	96%
No. of planning applications determined in 8 weeks	76.10%	77%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Determination of planning applications:					
a) major applications in 13 weeks	N/A	N/A	79%	69%	67%
b) minor applications in 8 weeks	N/A	N/A	54%	50%	72%
c) other applications in 8 weeks	N/A	N/A	79%	74%	90%
Percentage of household waste recycled	9.60%	9.20%	10.4%	11.1%	16.5%
Percentage of Council tax collected	97.30%	97.80%	97.8%	97.6%	98.2%
Percentage of business rates collected	98.40%	99.30%	97.4%	97.7%	98.4%
Working days sick per staff member	6.2 days	7.6 days	8.75 days	8.96 days	6 days
Percentage of early retirements of staff (not ill health)	0.20%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Proportion of rent collected	98%	98%	98.80%	97.93%	99%
Percentage of standard land searches carried out in 10 working days	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Homelessness decisions made within 33 working days	97.33%	97.80%	99.2%	N/A	N/A
Average length of stay in Bed and Breakfast accommodation*	40 days	41 days	27 days	2.5 days	0
Average time to complete new Housing Benefit claims	58.8 days	57.4 days	44 days	41.48 days	36 days
Cost of waste collection per household	£31.37	£30.58	£32.21	£39.95	£30.90
Percentage of responsive housing repairs for which appointment made and kept	96%	98%	99%	99.34%	99%
Number of missed bin collections per 100,000 collections	41	26	24	No longer an indicator.	
Visits to museums per 1000 populations	66.62	79.96	72	57.26	57.16
Percentage of authority buildings open to the public in which all public areas are suitable for and accessible to disabled people	26%	18%	34%	43%	71%

\* Definition changed in 2003/04, this indicator is no longer applicable.

## **Other Best Value Indicators and Local Performance Indicators**

Best value performance indicators are tracked and reported on a quarterly basis so that trends can be identified and actions taken where there is variance from expected performance. Trends and concerns on under performance are reported to members of the Council's Scrutiny Committee. Every service area is required to meet performance targets and to track its performance against a wide range of local indicators and service targets as part of the Council's budget making process. An analyses of all local performance indicators are included in Appendix 6.

During the course of the external auditors work on the Council's best value performance indicators, a number of adjustments were made and one indicator was qualified since the Council was unable to prove the accuracy of the reported outturn. *Since that audit the Council has established improved reporting of performance to Scrutiny Committee (enabling reporting systems to be verified during the year) and has employed additional time from internal auditors to test the reporting and monitoring processes that support key indicators.*

## **Management information and performance monitoring**

A number of quarterly monitors are produced, which collect together and analyse performance across a range of measures. The monitors are circulated to all staff and members and to the Council's consultative panels, for example the Environmental Panel and Tenants Forums, and made available to residents through display at the Council's main office receptions, one stop shops and libraries. These regular monitors include:

- Environmental monitor
- Finance monitor
- Service Organisations monitor
- Housing Information Bulletin
- Leisure monitor
- Anti Social Behaviour monitor

In addition to the comprehensive monitors management information is collated and reported to members on a regular basis in relation to:

- Land searches
- Insurance
- Capital expenditure
- Development control
- Debtors
- Prosecutions
- Building control

*During 2004/05, the Council intends to systematise its monitors for tracking external funding, especially from planning benefit agreements; and monitors for the implementation of residential estates; and for the availability of planning permission for new social housing units in the Borough.*

## **Environmental and other monitoring groups**

Because of the importance of environmental services and because they are delivered by a number of different services, a cross Council environmental officers group meets weekly to deal with key operational issues and develop shared policy responses. The group receives a range of regular monitoring information relating

to: grounds maintenance, including housing, highways, parks and open spaces, cemeteries, tree maintenance, dog waste, fly tips, abandoned cars, waste and recycling; street cleansing; markets and street adoptions. A similar group considers anti-social behaviour.

### Mystery shopper exercises

With other Herts districts and the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Council carries out a number of 'mystery shopper' exercises to monitor customer service. Areas covered include the Council's leisure facilities, homeless hostels, one stop shops, main offices and the speed and responsiveness of general telephone services. The results are published in committee reports. The Council proposes to extend these independent assessments of its services and has asked voluntary bodies to quote for an extended range of environmental monitoring during 2004/05.

### Complaints

The Council has a central complaints monitoring system which directly records complaints and other reports from the public. An annual report is taken to the Scrutiny Committee.

### Staff appraisal

The Council has had a staff performance appraisal system in place for many years. This is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it is meeting the Council's priorities. The relationship of staff performance management to other parts of the Council's performance framework is shown below.

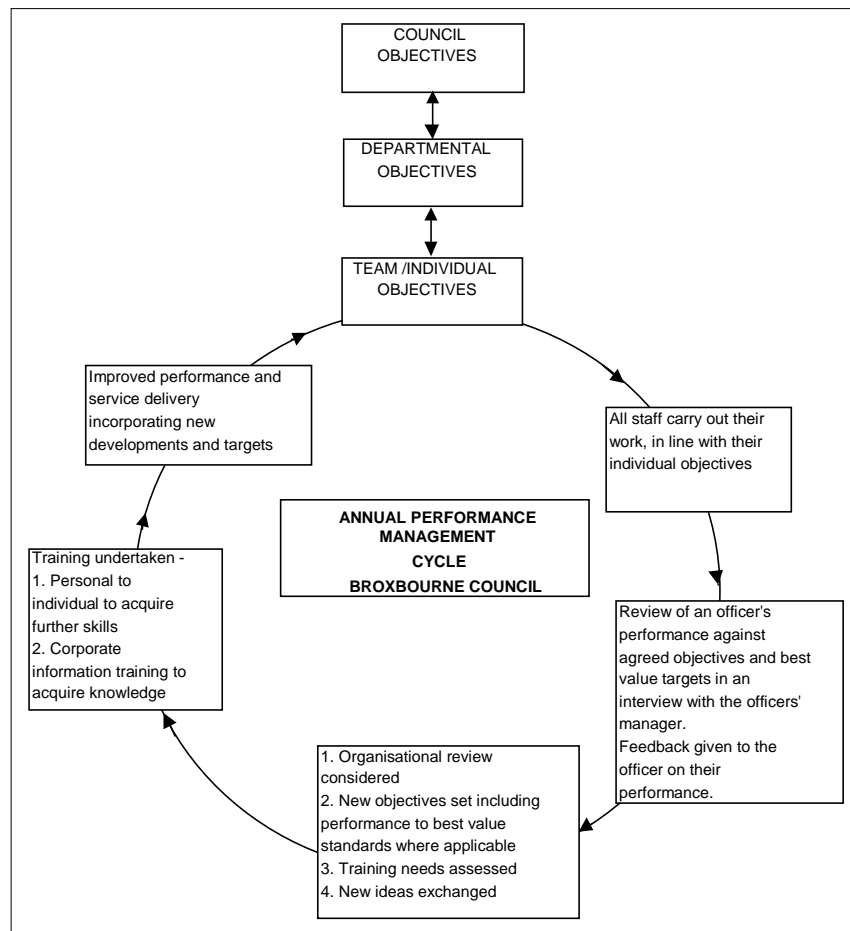


Fig 3 Staff Appraisal at Broxbourne Council

The appraisal system starts with the identification of the Council's business objectives. This is translated into associated performance and expenditure plans,

and specific objectives and priorities for individual staff. The training and development needs of staff are then assessed with staff encouraged to develop their own personal development plans. These are co-ordinated centrally by personnel services and a core training programme for staff produced. This is supplemented by a range of courses and learning events sourced from external suppliers, and experiential learning is encouraged. The effectiveness of these training interventions in helping the Council to achieve its performance targets is routinely assessed. At year end, individual performance is assessed and staff are awarded an appraisal score. This score is directly linked to the pay increase a person receives.

### **Annual Audit Letter 2002/03 - Performance Management & Planning**

Each year the Council's external auditors report on the Council's corporate governance, accounts, Best Value Performance Plan and performance management. In 2002/03 the external auditor reported that:

*"We have reviewed the Council's Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP), and anticipate issuing an unqualified opinion. We have identified areas where the plan can be strengthened, including the need to demonstrate clear and direct links between the Council's priorities and the impact planned from the resultant service objectives and targets from an external perspective. Our audit of the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) identified one reservation and a 34 (largely minor) amendments. The Council recognises the need to improve the robustness PI calculations if they are to be an effective tool and is strengthening arrangements in respect of 2003/04."*

The Council's external auditor issued an unqualified opinion of the 2002/03 Best Value Performance Plan and made some recommendations to further strengthen future plans, set out below with the Council's response:

<b>Audit recommendation</b>	<b>Council response</b>
Clarify and simplify the links between the Council's priorities and the impact planned from the resultant service objectives and targets	It is intended that the linkages between the Council's priorities and service impacts are now stated more overtly elsewhere in this plan.
Consider summarising how best value review outcomes have improved service performance	The statutory obligation for the Council to report comprehensively on best review outcomes and impact has now been reduced. Nevertheless, in response to the report on the Council's CPA, it is intended that BV review action plans will in future take greater account of the effect on services to residents and other impacts on customers. Plans will be outcome focused.
Ensure that targets have an external focus, in order to simplify impact assessment in future copies of the best value performance plan	The Council's priorities are all externally focused and impact assessment should now be more straightforward.

Simplify the presentation of PI information in order to focus on how it is managed in relation to achieving continuous improvement	A number of columns have been removed from the previous style of presentation, making the indicator information easier to understand and providing more opportunity for commentary.
--	---

The CPA assessment noted the Council's Scrutiny Committee was not being used as effectively as it might to challenge the Council's business. *The Council is therefore developing the Committee's role during 2004/05. This will include stronger separation of member representation on the Committee; more member training and development; tighter work planning and agenda management; improved cost accounting for officer work on the Scrutiny function and preventative prior scrutiny engagement in the Council's decision making.*

### **A Community Strategy for Broxbourne and Community Plan Priorities and their role in Performance Planning**

The Community Plan for Broxbourne was approved by the Local Strategy Partnership in October 2003 and the Council is driving the implementation phase of the plan. The Community Plan forms the overarching framework for the Council's plans and policies and it is the means by which the Council and other partners can ensure their plans and policies both fit together and meet the local community's needs. In practice, because of the way the Council's work on the community plan has been undertaken, the links with the Council's own performance planning are even closer than this statement implies.

The Council has sought to ensure community planning in Broxbourne is practical, focused and down to earth. The community plan is based on two strands of assessment which are kept under annual review

- (a) an audit of the socio economic characteristics of the local community
- (b) a local resource inventory of services and facilities for the community, which tries to identify local 'gaps' or relative deficiencies in local services.

These annual reviews keep the Council's assessment of the community's needs fresh and up to date and feed directly into the Council's performance planning too. *The 2004 review of the Community Plan audit was published in June 2004. The 2004 review of the inventory of local services will be published in August 2004.*

### **Community Plan Priorities**

The Council has identified clear priorities in the Community Plan and "SMART" action plans against each of these priorities. The Council has also allocated capital resources for 2003/04 and 2004/05 to contribute towards projects which will achieve these targets. A considerable challenge is faced in keeping all local partners focused on these plans. The LSP has identified "champions" for each of the themes to manage the process of action planning. Set against the ambitious

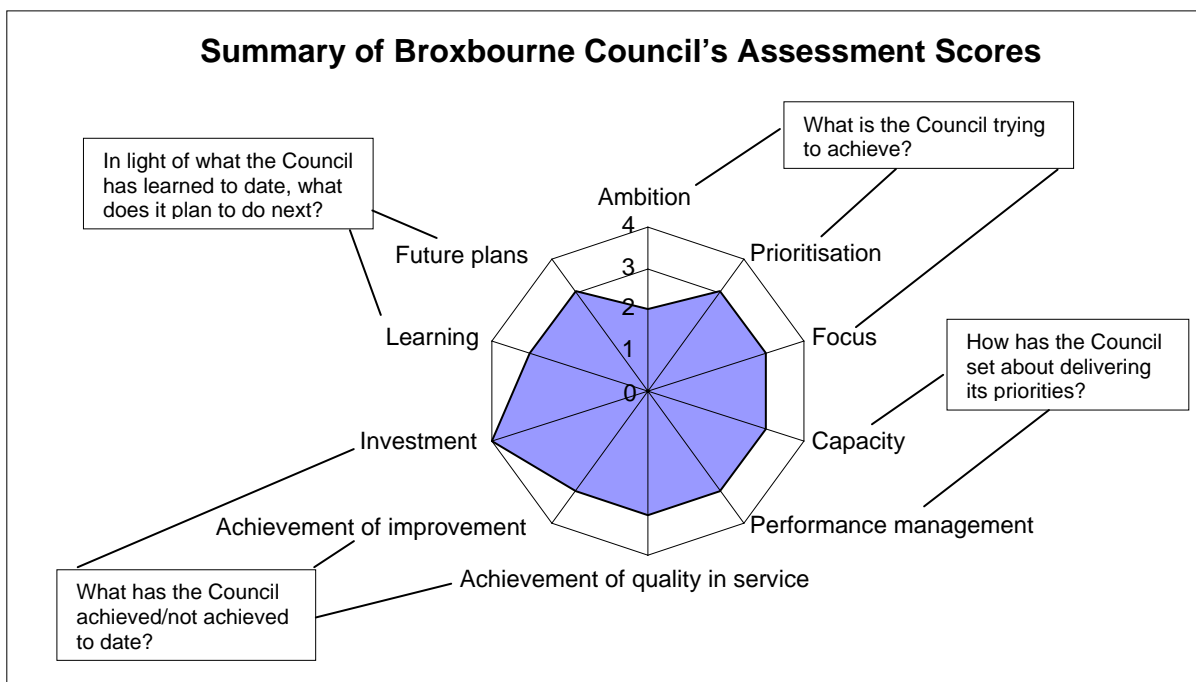
targets the LSP and the Council has set, this exercise is meeting with mixed success.

Of particular importance in this process is the engagement of the Council's RSL partners. A separate sub-group has been established to maximise the benefit of their participation. The RSL partners also have brought significant additional resources to the partnership aimed at engendering more community involvement and improving academic attainment and employment skills among the more socially disadvantaged in the community.

### 3 An Overview of Performance in 2003/04

#### (a) The Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment

The Government's comprehensive performance assessment highlighted those areas which the inspectors found to be the Council's main areas of strength and weakness. Overall, the Council was found to be a "good" council that has many of the building blocks in place to deliver further improvement. The Council achieved the highest numerical score of any of the Hertfordshire districts in its assessment.



1 = weak; 2 = weaknesses outweigh strengths; 3 = strengths outweigh weaknesses; 4 = strong  
Fig 4 - Spidergram summary of Council's CPA Scores

**Fig 5 Summary of Broxbourne Borough Council's Comprehensive Performance Weighted Assessment Scores**

Top Level Question	Theme	Grade	Weighted Score
What is the council trying to achieve?	Ambition	2	2
	Prioritisation	3	3
	Focus	3	3
How has the council set about delivering its priorities?	Capacity	3	3
	Performance management	3	3
What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?	Achievement in quality of service	3	9
	Achievement of improvement	3	9
	Investment	4	8
In light of what the council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	Learning	3	3
	Future plans	3	3
<b>Weighted score</b>			<b>46</b>
<b>Corporate assessment category</b>			<b>Good</b>

**Scoring Key** 1 – Weak; 2 - Weaknesses outweigh strengths; 3 - Strengths outweigh weaknesses; 4 - Strong

**Weighted Scores** The themes of achievement in quality of service and achievement of improvement are multiplied by three, and the theme of investment by two.

As this best value plan focuses on the improvements the Council wishes to achieve, and not its achievements, a summary of the assessor's suggested areas for improvement only are set out below. The Council's statement of high level ambitions and action plan is being refined in light of this list of issues.

## Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2004: Summary of Areas for Improvement suggested by the CPA

- 1 Articulate clear longer term ambitions for the area.
- 2 Increase level of awareness among councillors, partners and staff about what the Council is trying to achieve.
- 3 Support Council ambitions by measurable outcomes and long term targets.
- 4 Increase level of strategic political leadership.
- 5 Share long-term ambitions beyond the Council.
- 6 Use the scrutiny function more effectively by programming, etc.
- 7 Make explicit linkages between Council priorities, key tasks and corporate ambitions.
- 8 Embed the risk management functions in the Council's day to day processes.
- 9 Seek the priorities of minority communities.
- 10 Set clear plans for managing public expectations against "not priorities".
- 11 Address pockets of poor performance which impact on disadvantaged sections of the community:-
  - (a) Benefits administration: processing speed and accuracy
  - (b) Homelessness: time spent in hostels
  - (c) Provision of affordable homes
- 12 Even out absence of a consistent trend in improved performance against wider (national) performance indicators.
- 13 Systematise capture and sharing of learning across the whole Council.
- 14 Develop the information published on service standards for users and residents for services they access.
- 15 Develop plans for the Council-wide impact of LSVT.
- 16 Find means of evidencing that key messages are getting through to residents.
- 17 Develop more modern forms of housing procurement.
- 18 Develop councillor training and personal development, including strategic political leadership.
- 19 Improve challenge by opposition councillors.
- 20 Increase majority group inclusiveness by a plan of action.

The Council has already begun work on a number of these areas. Resources allocated to the benefits administration process have been significantly increased. External assistance has been hired to plan for the impact of LSVT. MORI led focus groups have been commissioned. An extended member training and development programme has been established. Officer training is being systematised, across the Council. Working groups on the impact of LSVT are underway. An internal audit report on key areas of performance management has been commissioned to address the issues raised by the CPA. A comprehensive improvement plan is being prepared in conjunction with the Audit Commission's follow up on the Council's CPA. Senior members of the Council meet regularly and informally to strengthen the strategic political leadership of the Council.

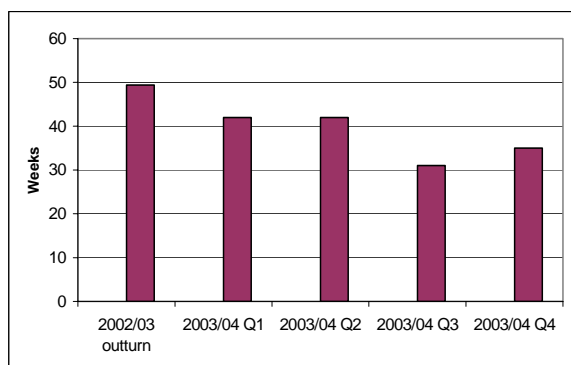
### Other Measures of Performance in 2003/04

The Council improved performance in 2003/04 in 25 indicators out of a total of 51 statutory measures that are comparable with 2002/03. A full table of statutory and local indicators is at Appendix 6. At the date of publication of this plan, the ODPM has not published inter-authority BV 2003 survey results, but a comparison undertaken by the ten Hertfordshire district councils showed the level of satisfaction with overall Council services is the joint highest, and the level of public satisfaction with a range of other key environmental services is the highest of the Hertfordshire districts.

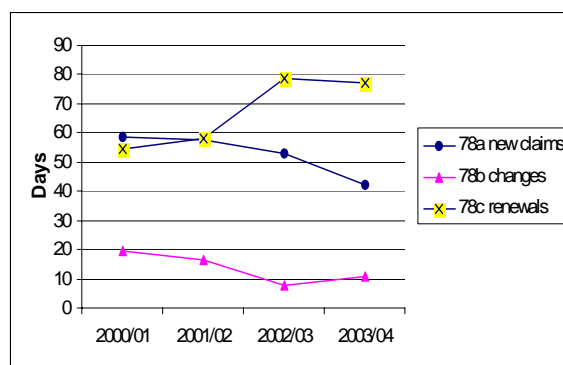
One of the ways in which the Council tests the quality of its services is by seeking external independent comparisons, accreditations or awards. In 2003/04 existing accreditations and quality standards were renewed. The Council's web site was recognised for the best website content on planning services in Hertfordshire. The Council was also shortlisted for beacon status for services for elderly people.

In 2003/04 the Council had the third lowest district tax level in England - a measure of the value for money offered to local tax payers. In 2004/05 the Council tax remained significantly lower than any other in Hertfordshire and the Council's element of the council tax is now the second lowest for districts in the country. Even after the addition of the county council and police elements the typical council tax bill in Broxbourne remains the third lowest in the country.

The CPA highlighted housing benefit processing and the length of time homeless people spend in hostels as areas of concern. In 2003/04 the Council has improved performance in the processing of new housing benefit claims, although the time for changes of circumstances to be processed has increased. The average time spent by homeless people in hostels has dropped by 23 weeks. The following diagrams display some of the changes in key indicators in the last few years.



Homeless families with children - average weeks spent in hostels



Housing benefit processing

*It is proposed to publish a new annual leaflet on performance planning incorporating simple graphs and diagrams like these to encourage public interest and awareness in the Council's activities and its impact on the quality of local life in the Borough.*

### Surveys of Residents' Views during 2003/04

During 2003/04 the Council undertook its biennial MORI survey of residents' attitudes and views. In addition, it fulfilled a statutory requirement to undertake a best value survey of satisfaction with Council services, to the Government's specification and prescription. The full results of the MORI survey are set out in Appendices 3(a) and 3(b). The Government's comparative inter-authority survey is awaited, though key local findings have been extracted and are summarised below and in Appendix 3(b). Taken together, these results contain a wealth of information on residents' priorities and perceptions of the quality of local services. *Of particular interest for the work of the Council are residents' perceptions of which services need improvement and the contribution those services make to the quality of local life.*

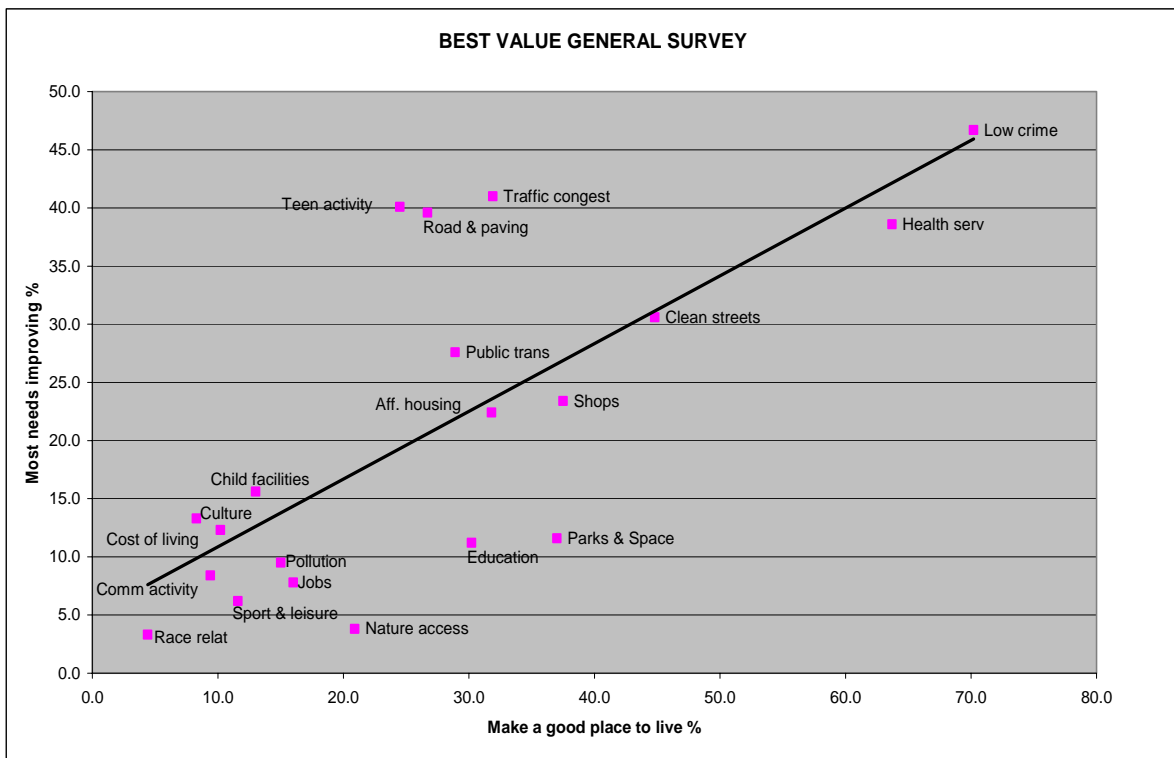


Fig 5 Residents' perceptions of improvements required to local services and perceptions of components of quality of local life

The graph shows the association between the factors perceived to make a good place to live and the things which need improving. The relationship is positive and fairly strong ( $r=+0.73$ ). Attention is drawn to the three factors significantly well above the line of best fit, two of which now fall outside this Council's control.

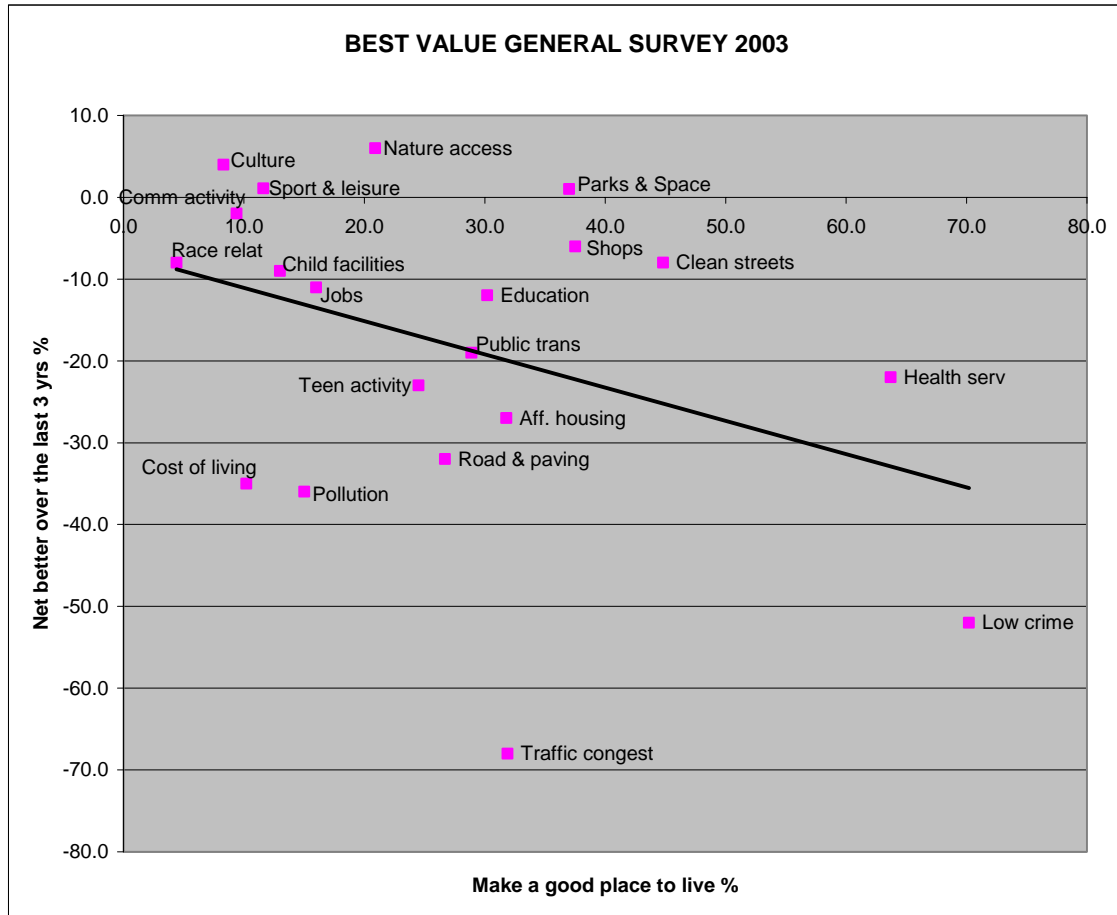


Fig 6 Residents' perceptions of whether services are perceived to be improving and perception of components of the quality of local life

The graph shows the relationship between the respondents' perception of improvement or decline in local conditions and their views on the things which make the area a good place to live. The association is negative but not as strong as the other relationship discussed above ( $r+0.37$ ). *This association suggests that the respondents perceive those factors which make the area a good place to live are generally getting worse.* Traffic congestion, low crime, and roads and paving are again significant issues, but largely outside the control of the Borough Council. As identified by MORI, national trends in public attitudes over the last three years have an inevitable impact on local findings like these. However, *the associations set out in the two graphs above reveal how challenging the Council's objectives to improve the perceived quality of local life and local "liveability" will be, as the key determinants of the wellbeing of local residents largely lie outside the Council's control.* These reinforce findings from the 2003 MORI survey. In terms of benchmarking levels of satisfaction with the Council's services compared with other councils, the Government's analysis was not published by June 2004. However, informal analysis conducted by Hertfordshire district councils shows levels of satisfaction with key services in Broxbourne, on the whole, are the highest or near highest in the area.

## Best Value Reviews in 2003/04

### (a) The Street Scene

The Street Scene best value review was inspected by the Audit Commission in 2003/04 and judged to have demonstrated good services (2 stars) with promising prospects for improvement. In particular the inspectors noted:

- The streets, open spaces and car parks are generally clean and free from litter and grassed areas are reasonably well maintained.
- Customers find it easy to access services via the helpline, one-stop-shops and extended opening hours. Good information is available on the interactive website but some information provided in leaflets is inaccurate and out-of-date.
- The council responds quickly to reports of abandoned vehicles and aims to remove offensive graffiti and fly-tipping within 24 hours.
- However, the cost of keeping the Borough clean is comparatively high and some public toilets are targets for vandals and are poorly maintained.
- The council has a clear plan for improving services ensuring better value for money and improving customer satisfaction.
- Some issues identified as important to the public by the review have already been implemented.

### The Best Value Review Programme in 2003/2004

In previous performance plans the Council provided updates for all completed best value reviews. This is no longer a government requirement, but the paragraphs below provide an update on those reviews that were started by the Council in 2003/04.

### (b) Central Services

The Council has started a review of its management support services, looking at how the Council's central services support the work of frontline teams, covering finance, information technology, personnel and legal services. The separate studies have proceeded at different rates and a range of improvements have been identified for these individual services to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the Council. *However, these findings now need to be brought together cohesively and corporately to identify common themes and shared issues. An integrated programme of challenge and common scrutiny and reference to stakeholder groups is required too.*

Service	Current Position
ICT	<p>The review has been re-scoped and now covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ How well prepared is the Council to achieve the opportunities for customer services offered by ICT developments?</li> <li>◆ What areas need most development?</li> <li>◆ Does the Council have the capacity to meet all parts of the e-government agenda?</li> </ul>

Service	Current Position
	<p>◆ How will ICT support the work of other services? It is proposed to complete the review by 31 March 2005.</p>
Personnel	Stated to be completed. The review and action plan form the basis for the personnel business plan for 2004/05.
Legal	The review has been drafted and is currently under consideration by officers.
Finance	The review is stated to be complete and the final report and action plan are under consideration. However, further review and scrutiny is required in light of the CPA findings on risk management and other issues, and the relationship between this review and other central service reviews must be systematically tested and challenged in order to yield maximum benefits for the Council.

All these reviews will require co-ordinated challenge and scrutiny from a common Council-wide perspective before final completion.

### (c) **Private Sector Housing**

A review of private sector housing services has started, focusing on services provided by the Environmental Health residential team with some elements of services provided by the housing needs team. *The Council will need to assess whether external assistance is required to bring this review to a successful conclusion by the Council's timescale and to ensure the review fully meets the needs of the local community for stimulating all sources of affordable housing.*

## **4 Strategic Improvement Programme Issues, Actions and Targets for 2004/05**

In 2004/05 the Council will focus on the following strategic improvement actions:

- Complete the review of Council high level goals, ambitions and action plans by November 2004.
- Review the CPA recommendations on political leadership and its links with service improvement, and draw up an improvement plan.
- Complete outstanding 2003/04 best value reviews and bring central service reviews together under an integrative overview and overall action plan.
- Establish development milestones for the Council's scrutiny function and embed scrutiny and challenge in the Council's improvement programme.
- Develop an annual budget for the scrutiny function for the financial year 2005/06, and track all expenditure on the scrutiny function during 2004/05.
- Extend and intensify the annual training and development programme for elected members, so as to achieve a step change in the preparedness and capacity of elected members, and systematise officer training across the Council.
- Improve committee work, programming and planning, and committee business and agenda management.
- Make an application for Council-wide IIP accreditation for all Council services.

- Undertake the lead role in a new audit of crime and disorder and renew the local crime and disorder strategy by 31st March 2005.
- Benchmark 2003 BPI survey outcomes when ODPM assessments become available and assess their implications for the Council's services.
- Collate, develop and publish service standards for users and residents, by March 2005 in accordance with the CPA recommendations.
- Improve mechanisms for identifying tracking and collating external sources of resource funding such as planning gain, and key quality of local life indicators.
- Significant additional resources are being applied to the Council's ICT function. Alongside improvements to the project prioritisation and implementation planning for ICT projects, during 2004/05 and 2005/06 significant increases in output and practical benefits from this work will be required.
- Secure improvements in the high impact services identified by the Council's CPA:-
  - Improve the processing of new housing benefit claims to 40 days, achieving the top quartile among districts within three years
  - Improve the processing of housing benefits changes in circumstances to 9 days, achieving the top quartile among districts within three years
  - Provide 350 new affordable homes in 2004/05 and 2005/06
  - Reduce the average length of time spent in hostel accommodation to 35 weeks in 2004/05 and to 30 weeks by March 2007.
- The ballot of tenants on stock transfer is scheduled to take place between January and March 2005. Dependent on the result, transfer itself is scheduled for October/November of that year. The Council is engaging consultants to assist with the workload both pre- and post-ballot. The Council is also considering the best configuration of services and the best organisational structure post-LSVT.
- 2004/05 will see the outcome of the largest affordable development programme for several years with c350 dwellings completed in the two year period. The challenge will be to sustain that level in future years. The Council is concerned at the Housing Corporation suggestion that S106 development should be delivered without grant. The likely impact could seriously affect the Council's ability to meet local housing needs. The changes in RTB rules with a percentage going to a national pool could reduce the resources available to meet housing needs locally and this coupled with the abolition of LASHG will potentially mitigate against the delivery of a programme.

Without the stimulus of a comprehensive performance assessment, and with a reduced best value programme, there is a risk the will and momentum for improving services and securing value for money will be lost or dissipated. Complacency, departmentalism and fragmentation of effort are other risks. The Council will find it difficult to sustain the current levels of improvement activity but it recognises that it must take steps to do so. The assistance of the Council's external auditors and the Audit Commission will be welcome.

## The Council's Review Programme

In the first Best Value Performance Plan, 2000-2001, the Council published its five year programme of service reviews which included eight reviews for 2003/04. In response to guidance issued by the Audit Commission, the 2001-2002 BVPP re-drew the programme to introduce a smaller number of cross-cutting, Council-wide reviews and whole service reviews. Since then, the programme proposed has been re-considered in the light of new priorities and new ODPM statutory guidance. Because there will no longer be a requirement to review all services over a five year period, the Council can be more flexible in its approach. The criteria for review selection are shown below.

### General Criteria for review selection

#### *Consultation*

- Council priorities, in particular cross Council and cross-service priorities
- Resident feedback through MORI and other surveys
- Other consultations and feedback

#### *Comparison*

- Quartile ranking in national performance indicators
- Cost comparisons
- Work with benchmarking partners

#### *Competition*

- Timing of contract renewals

#### *Other considerations*

- The outcome of the CPA inspection
- Contribution to Council-wide performance
- Implementation of national priorities
- Scale of service-function and expenditure involved
- Income delivered by service
- Service managers' priorities
- Workload balance

## Best Value Reviews for 2004/05 - Practical Criteria for Policy

With the benefit of the outcome of its comprehensive performance assessment, the Council has set a number of criteria proposed reviews must satisfy.

### 1 **Timing**

What is the rationale for the timing of the proposed review? In light of the Council's experience, is the proposal feasible?

### 2 **Scope**

Will the scope of the proposed review deliver SMART actions, or is it too broad to be operable?

### 3 CPA Implications

Does the review link to CPA outcomes/themes explicitly?

### 4 Audit Commission Policy

The Council needs to allow the scope of reviews to be flexible whilst the CPA outcomes and Audit Inspection regime are still being understood. It may be necessary to adjust the timing and scope of the review as the Council's approach becomes clearer. In addition, the Audit Commission has indicated a preference for thematic, cross-cutting reviews and their inspection programme is likely to follow suit rather than keeping to the scope of any particular review.

### 5 Council Policy

What are the Council's needs in the context of limited resources (reviews are resource intensive and draw in officer time from a number of departments)? The Council cannot carry out all reviews it potentially identifies and needs to prioritise and select the key reviews in terms of:-

- CPA outcomes
- Continuous improvement
- Customer satisfaction
- Links with contract re-lets and other factors (e.g. legislative changes).

### 6 Quality Targets for Best Value Reviews

The Council has set itself the goal of achieving reviews of a quality which if externally inspected, will achieve at least "two star" reviews, with at least the likelihood of improvement. The Council must satisfy itself the proposed reviews will reach the required quality, depth and insight.

The table below sets out the latest position on new reviews planned for 2004/05 and the subsequent year.

Working title	Proposed areas covered
Revenue services	The current restructuring of these services (including revisions to staffing and resource allocations) is underway. The findings of the CPA reinforce the need for a review. Scrutiny Committee will receive an update in September 2004. A scoping report will be brought to the next Scrutiny Committee.
Planning	Development control has been reviewed successfully and subject to external inspection. A mini review on Local plan development (local development frameworks); and its links with community planning; LA21; economic development is proposed. <i>This will enable the Council to consider its preparedness for</i>

Working title	Proposed areas covered
	<i>the new development framework and to address existing unresolved management issues in the local plan and regional planning areas.</i>
Democratic functions	Members support and development; committee and report management; electoral services; outside bodies. <i>Step changes are proposed in the member induction, training and development programme. Electoral processes are set to change significantly. It is intended that this review should commence in 2004/05 and complete in 2005/06, and will be used to sustain services which are among the Council's most cost-effective into the "next generation".</i>
Leisure services	The outline and scope of this review is being challenged to ensure it is feasible, will reach the quality standards set by the Council, meet the Audit Commission's requirements, and will add value to the community's services. The Council will need to ensure the scope of this review is not too wide, is interdisciplinary and cross-cutting. The Commission have advised the review focus should address the social inclusivity of the Council services and the effectiveness of the services contribution to meeting the wider outcomes and social goals of the Council. Services to young people and other hard to reach groups are suggested.

Further systematic follow up work is required during 2004/05 on services previously subject to review:-

- **Contract procurement parameters and adherence to Council policy**

The Council's procurement processes have been subject to a successful externally inspected review but the Council's policies and financial standing orders are not being followed closely enough to secure all the benefits of the Council's policies.

- **Property Management**

Aspects of the Council's review of the property management function is not being "bedded in" firmly enough, and the systematisation of review findings needs to be strengthened to raise service effectiveness and obtain review benefits.

- **ICT Services**

It is envisaged that during the year a substantial programme of follow up work will be required to secure the benefits of the additional resources

applied to ICT and the BV review of ICT services, including a review of the Council's ICT strategy.

To set the review programme beyond 2005/06, further clarification will be required from the Audit Commission on its priorities, proposed inspection programme and the timetable for the Council's next CPA.

## **6 Contracts Awarded 2003/04 and 2004/05**

The Council certifies, in accordance with Workforce Matters in Local Services Contracts, that no staff were transferred from Broxbourne Council during the year 2003/04.

It is estimated that the Council spends over £10m per annum of its total service expenditure on contracts valued over £20k p.a. Some £5.6m of these contracts are placed with the Council's five service organisations. All these contracts provide formal structured opportunities to secure improvements in services on renewal and through the contract terms and specifications, a framework for continuous service improvements.

An annual report is made each year on procurement processes to scrutinise the award and management of Council contracts. Appendix 8 sets out the report for 2003/04, which also looks ahead to 2004/05.

## **7 Conclusion**

Completion of the Council's CPA provides an opportunity to make an improvement and a watershed in performance planning and an opportunity to seek a step change in its style and scope.

The Council intends to build on the CPA report to use its recommendations to and seek higher standards of service. As a high level ambition, the Council will be asked to affirm it will now pursue excellence in service delivery. It is not yet clear when the Audit Commission will reassess the Council in the next CPA but if the Council's goal is to secure a score of "excellent", the areas in which improvement will be required have been made clear. The Council must now respond to the challenge. Improving performance planning has an important role to play in facilitating this improvement.