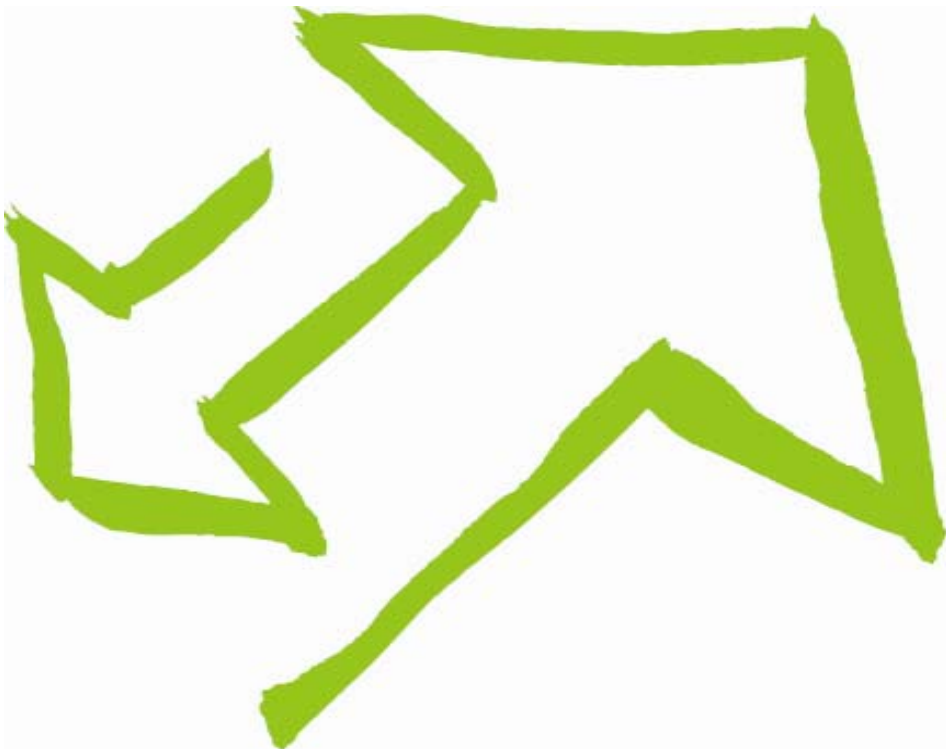


# Access to Services Inspection

Bassetlaw District Council

May 2009

**Embargoed until 00.01 on 11 June 2009**



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# Service Inspections

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our Strategic Plan and Strategic Regulation. They also reflect the principles from '*The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003)*'. Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater coordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk).

This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

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# Summary

- 1** Bassetlaw is located in North Nottinghamshire and covers one third of the county. The district has a small black and minority ethnic population of around 2.7 per cent. A relatively high percentage (19.3 per cent) of the population is aged over 65 and 39.4 per cent of its households contain at least one person with a limiting long-term illness, compared to 34 per cent nationally. Unemployment is below average, though average salaries are also low.
- 2** Access to services is a cross-cutting theme applicable to all councils and council services. It covers four broad areas: ease of access to services; using e-government to support access to services; reaching all parts of the community; and partnership working. For customers, this means that they should be able to contact councils in a range of accessible and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant physical localities. They should also be able to contact councils through a range of other remote methods. This includes a website which is fully accessible and easy to navigate with appropriate arrangements for electronic transactions, electronic communication and consultation.
- 3** This inspection looked at the Council's approach to providing access to its services. It looked at whether residents can contact the Council to access all its services in a variety of accessible physical locations; and through a range of remote methods such as by telephone or over the internet through a website that is easy to navigate. All Council services should be focused on the needs of the whole community, ensuring equality of access and catering for the diversity of residents and users. There should be appropriate arrangements for consulting, engaging and communicating with users and non-users of services.
- 4** Bassetlaw District Council is delivering 'good' access to its services. Customer focus is an important cross-cutting theme for the Council. The public can access services through one-stop shops in Worksop and Retford and a network of rural 'help points', via a range of well-publicised telephone numbers and through the website. There are clear service standards that have been developed in consultation with local users and decisions about access to services are based on an understanding of the access needs and preferences of the community. Effective partnership working extends access to services for local people, particularly in rural areas. However, user satisfaction with the Council is relatively poor. Currently the Council's website has limited facility for transactions and a Customer Relationship Management system, which will enable more effective management of user enquiries, is at an early stage of development. The Council has plans to address both these issues.
- 5** The Council's prospects for improvement are 'promising'. Access to services is clearly understood and is supported by a clear vision and leadership. Improving accessibility is a corporate priority and progress has been made in the development of customer access through 'one stop shops' and 'Help Points'. There is an improving performance management framework in place and plans are becoming more outcome focused. Effective leadership, financial management and partnership working mean the Council is well placed to deliver plans.

# Scoring the service

6 We have assessed Bassetlaw District Council as providing a 'good', two-star service that has 'promising' prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Figure 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>**

	<b>Prospects for improvement?</b>					‘a good service that has promising prospects for improvement’
Excellent					<b>A good service?</b>	
Promising						
Uncertain						
Poor						
	Poor	Fair ★	Good ★★	Excellent ★★★		

Source: Audit Commission

7 The service is a good, two star service because:

- the Council's vision for access to services is clear and its priorities are shared with stakeholders and partners;
- the Council operates a variety of access channels and as a result its services are easy to access;
- decisions about access to services are based on an understanding of the access needs and preferences of the community;
- effective partnership working extends access to services for local people, particularly in rural areas;
- there are clear service standards that have been developed in consultation with local users;

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- the Council has effective arrangements for consulting, engaging and communicating with local people; and
- there are well-developed arrangements for challenging services to improve cost and quality.

### 8 However, there are gaps in some areas:

- user satisfaction with the Council is relatively poor;
- the Council's website allows limited transactions and the CRM system which will enable more effective management of user enquiries is at an early stage of development; and
- although the Council has assessed the accommodation needs of the gypsy and traveller community it has not been in a position to identify how it will address these within the local development framework.

### 9 The service has 'promising' prospects for improvement because of the following.

- The Council has a good track record of delivering improvements for users in accessing services. Plans and resources have been allocated to improving access to services and equality of access including to mitigate rural isolation.
- Investment in facilities has led to improvements in the quality of services for local residents and the Council has improved poorly performing services such as housing.
- The Council works effectively with partners to ensure value for money in access to services and learns from others in order to improve.
- There is visible leadership for improving access to services. Council plans support a strong focus on improving access to services and are based on an understanding of local needs.
- Performance management arrangements are improving and scrutiny is effectively challenging performance and decision making.
- There are appropriate human resources in place to deliver improvements to access to services.
- Partnerships are being used effectively to deliver access improvements.
- Procurement and external funding is used to support service improvements.

### 10 However:

- improvement in performance is average and levels of satisfaction with the Council remain poor; and
- plans are not always SMART<sup>2</sup>. They lack clear measurable outcomes that would enable the Council to be clear about the difference they are making for local people; and
- performance management tends to lack a strategic, outward focus.

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<sup>2</sup> Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Timed

# Recommendations

**11** To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition, we identify the approximate costs<sup>3</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council should do the following.

### Recommendation

- R1** Further improve the Councils strategic planning framework /performance management by:
- ensuring that plans demonstrate clearly how the Council will improve outcomes for local people;
  - developing action plans with SMART objectives to show how the Council will deliver real improvements in access to services;
  - aligning plans and strategies to provide a clear focus for the Council's objectives and an effective framework for how they will be delivered;
  - refining performance management arrangements so that the Council can clearly monitor the achievement of objectives and delivery of outcomes; and
  - evaluating projects to ensure that they are delivering expected outcomes.

**12** The expected benefits of this recommendation are as follows.

- A greater focus and clarity of the Council's objectives in relation to access to services.
- Greater ability to effectively plan, monitor and demonstrate that the Council is achieving its objectives and intended outcomes.

**13** The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by December 2009.

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<sup>3</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

### Recommendation

- R2** Improve customer access and the effective management of customer enquiries by:
- fully implementing the CRM system; and
  - implementing the planned developments to the website.

**14** The expected benefits of this recommendation are as follows.

- Simplified and more direct access to the Council for residents.
- Ability to monitor and manage customer contacts more effectively.
- Greater scope for residents to interact electronically with the Council.
- Improved telephone contact with the Council.

**15** The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by December 2009.

# Report

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## Context

### The locality

- 16** Bassetlaw is the most northerly Nottinghamshire district council and it is geographically one of the largest districts in Nottinghamshire, measuring 63,786 hectares and with a population of 111,700 (est. 2007). The district has seen an increase in population of 7 per cent since 2001. Population density is low at less than two persons per hectare. The district has a small Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population of 2.7 per cent (2001 census). The district has suffered from the decline of traditional industries, especially coal-mining. A relatively high proportion of the population (19.3 per cent) is over 65 and 39.4 per cent of households contain at least one person with a limiting long-term illness.
- 17** Although local and regional government boundaries place Bassetlaw in the East Midlands and Nottinghamshire, its geographical location next to Yorkshire and Humberside impact on the district economically, socially and culturally. The District Council's boundaries are coterminous with those of the Bassetlaw Primary Care Trust (PCT). Bassetlaw is also part of the Sheffield City Region (SCR), which includes Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster. Pressures from economic growth and housing development are having a significant impact on Bassetlaw.
- 18** Intervention by a range of partner agencies, including Bassetlaw District Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and the East Midlands Development Agency has contributed towards the unemployment rate falling considerably in recent years to below the national average (2.4 per cent in Bassetlaw in comparison with 2.8 per cent nationally). However new jobs have tended to be in the warehousing and distribution industries, with relatively low wage levels. Average weekly earnings in Bassetlaw are £403.70 in comparison with the national average of £479.10.
- 19** Almost 60 per cent of Bassetlaw's population live in the main towns of Worksop and Retford. Outside these towns there are a large number of villages and hamlets with only 17 having a population of more than 1,000. Public transport links to many of the outlying areas present challenges for service delivery.

### The Council

- 20** The Council is made up of 48 Councillors. Following the May 2008 elections, there are 30 Conservative, 16 Labour and two Independent Councillors. The Conservative Group forms the political administration of the Council. Cabinet members' portfolios are aligned to each of the Council's services, which reflect the Council's priorities and were revised in January 2007 following the implementation of a new organisational structure.

- 21** The Council employs 483 (Full Time Equivalent) people, having a net budget of £16.3 million, and a capital programme of £21.7 million (February 2009). In December 2003 the Council was judged as 'fair' (out of a range of poor, weak, fair, good and excellent) in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

### National context

- 22** The Government sees customer access as important and in its 'Strong Leadership - Quality Public Services' white paper it identified seven key tests for local government (joined up, accessible, delivered or supported electronically, delivered jointly, delivered seamlessly, open and accountable, and used by e-citizens). In 1999 the white paper, 'Modernising Government', new reforms and targets required local authorities to move towards electronic delivery in their services to the local community. The intention was that 100 per cent of dealings with Government, including local government and the NHS, should be capable of being conducted electronically by the public by December 2005. Other national drivers include the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995. The white paper, 'Modern Local Government - In Touch With the People', also sought to put local government in touch with local communities by improving local democracy, increasing financial accountability and improving local services. Councils should have plans to meet the impending legislative requirements to actively promote disability, gender and age equality as well as meeting the current requirements to promote race equality.
- 23** Access to services is a cross-cutting theme applicable to all councils and council services. It covers four broad areas: ease of access to services; using e-government to support access to services; reaching all parts of the community; and partnership working. For customers, it means that they should be able to contact councils in a range of accessible and DDA compliant physical localities. They should also be able to contact councils through a range of other remote methods. This includes through a fully accessible, easy-to-navigate website. There should be appropriate arrangements for electronic transactions, electronic communication and consultation.
- 24** Councils should have an e-government programme informed by citizen/user needs and aspirations. Council services, and access to those services, should be focused on the needs of the whole community. They should ensure equality of access and take proper account of equality and the diversity of all service users. There should be appropriate arrangements for consulting, engaging and communicating with users and non-users of services. Councils should use partnership working with neighbouring councils, organisations and businesses to provide seamless and high quality access to services wherever this possible.

### Bassetlaw District Council's approach to access to services

- 25** Access to the majority of Bassetlaw District Council services is primarily via two 'one-stop shops' in Worksop and Retford, a network of rural help points and directly via individual services. Service details, contact numbers and email addresses are available on the Council's website and through Council literature.

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# How good is the service?

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## What has the service aimed to achieve?

**26** The Council seeks to work in partnership to meet individual needs and to provide services in a variety of different ways. It is a key partner in the Bassetlaw Sustainable Communities Strategy 2007 to 2009, which sets out the partners' vision and ambitions for the district. This is the second community strategy and provides the framework for public organisations in Bassetlaw to work together in a cost effective way. It identifies three overall objectives.

- Economic Well-being - Creating Jobs and Enterprise within the District to secure our long-term viability.
- Social Well-being - Ensuring our communities are Safe and Strong enabling residents to take an active role in their local neighbourhoods, lead a healthy lifestyle and live without fear of crime.
- Environmental Well-being - We want Bassetlaw to be a Clean and Green area for those that live and work here.

**27** These objectives link to the wider Nottinghamshire Local Area Agreement (LAA) and have also been adopted by the Council in its Corporate Plan 2007 to 2010, together with a fourth priority.

- Efficient and Effective - to ensure we have effective use of resources and achieving value for money.

**28** The Council recognises that addressing the access needs of residents is fundamental to delivering its corporate objectives and it has had a clear focus on access to services for some time. The Corporate Plan highlights a number of 'flagship projects' which are intended to help deliver the Council's objectives. One of these seven projects is entitled 'Customer Standards'. The outline of this project is described as follows.

**To ensure that we consistently provide an excellent service to all our customers the Customer First Programme was introduced. This looks at every aspect of service delivery ranging from the way we respond to customer enquiries, access to information about our services, physical access to our buildings, the way we meet the needs of diverse communities and how we consult and deal with feedback from our customers.**

- 29** The Customer First programme was implemented in 2007 and is now completed. As part of the programme the Council delivered the following.
- Achievement of Level 2 of the Local Government Equality Standard.
  - Publication of a Community Engagement Strategy.
  - Publication of a Council wide consultation timetable.
  - Publication of new customer standards following consultation with the Citizens' Panel.
  - Publication of an Access Strategy.
- 30** The Customer First Programme has now been superseded by the Access Bassetlaw Council programme (ABC). This aims to ensure that the needs of the customer are clearly identified and embedded across the Council in the delivery of its services. The programme covers three strands; Easy to Reach Services, Satisfied Customers and Involved People. It identifies a range of actions and milestones for each strand and target dates for completion.
- 31** The Council's Access Strategy was developed in 2007. It aims to support the delivery of the Council's objectives by improving access to the Council. It sets out the vision that:
- Customers will be able to access services when they want and how they want. They will deal with empowered, customer focused staff. Their queries will be dealt with end to end at this first point of contact.**
- 32** The Access strategy has the following five elements.
- A focus on customers.
  - Accessibility and choice.
  - Partnerships.
  - Systems and Information.
  - Service Efficiency.
- 33** An action plan identifies the outcomes that the Council is seeking to achieve for each element.
- 34** The Council's Unity Framework 2009 to 2011 sets out the Council's approach to tackling exclusion in Bassetlaw. It acknowledges that exclusion comes in many forms such as unemployment, low skill levels, low incomes, poor housing, high crime rates, living in a rural area and lack of access to services. It attempts to ensure that addressing these issues is a fundamental part of service delivery through the annual service planning process and sets out a range of actions for each service area.

## How good is the service?

- 35** The Comprehensive Equality Plan, developed in partnership with A1 Housing Ltd<sup>4</sup>, sets out the Council's commitment to equality and diversity. It aims to reach Level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard by December 2009, Level 4 by December 2010 and Level 5 by December 2011<sup>5</sup>. It incorporates a Corporate Equality and Diversity Action Plan and requires each service area to identify specific equality issues through service delivery plans.

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## Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

### Customer and community focus

- 36** Customer focus is an important cross-cutting theme for the Council. There is a clear commitment to improving customer access to services and this is reflected in corporate planning. The focus on customers is not recent. In 1998 the Council created two new services, Bassetlaw East and Bassetlaw West which sought to respond to the specific needs of residents in these geographic areas. This included amalgamation of frontline services such as Housing, Council Tax, and Benefits, and the establishment of new offices in Retford and the opening of the Council's first 'One Stop Shop'. In 2000 the Council and Police developed the Police Mobile Support Unit, introduced video conferencing for residents in remote areas and achieved a Charter Mark Award for Bassetlaw East Customer Service. In 2005 the One Stop Shop in Worksop was opened together with the Misterton Centre in partnership with the Parish Council and the Police. This sustained customer and community focus has helped to ensure that the access needs of customers are at the heart of service development.
- 37** Decisions about access to services are based on an understanding of the access needs and preferences of the community. A citizens' panel has been used to identify the preferred methods of contacting the Council, what customers expect and regard as important when contacting the Council and areas that they feel need improving. This information has been used to shape the Access Strategy. For example, the preference to contact the Council by phone or face-to-face and talk directly to Council staff has prompted extended hours for telephone access, the promotion of contact telephone numbers in the Council 'A to Z', website and Bassetlaw News (Council newspaper) and also the development of the One Stop Shops and network of help points. When surveyed 98 per cent of residents said that the most important factor when contacting the Council by phone is getting through to the right department or person first time. As a result the Council has set a target to answer at least 80 per cent of customer enquiries at the first point of contact. Information on the needs and preferences of service users is therefore used in the planning and delivery of access to services.

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<sup>4</sup> A1 Housing Ltd is an arms length management organisation which has responsibility for the day to day management of the Council's housing stock.

<sup>5</sup> The Local Government Equality Standard is replaced in April 2009 by the Equality Framework for Local Government with a revised grading scheme.

- 38** The Council has a clear focus on improving access for vulnerable groups. It has identified that some of the most acute access needs relate to people living in rural communities, the elderly and people in deprived communities. It is involved in a range of initiatives, often in partnership, to address the specific needs of these groups. Examples include working with parish councils and voluntary groups to provide rural access points, working with the County Council on the 'Transport to Health' initiative to improve access to health services in the area and the 'dial-a-trip' scheme which provides transport primarily for older people. It is also active with partners in deprived ex-mining communities such as Manton and Harworth to help ensure that local people have information and access to local services. By prioritising its activities the Council is helping to ensure that the most vulnerable groups are not further disadvantaged through a lack of access to services.
- 39** There are some gaps in the Council's understanding of user needs and experience. This is acknowledged in the Access Strategy which identifies the following challenges.
- Fall in customer satisfaction.
  - Limited management information on why customers are dissatisfied.
  - Services may be customer-centric but the organisation is not.
  - Need to train staff to deal with customers as well as imparting business knowledge.
  - Need to develop greater understanding of needs of hard to reach groups.
- 40** The Council is taking steps to address these challenges, for example, it has identified 25 groups that are representative of the community and appointed a senior link officer for each in order to engage and better understand the needs of these groups. It has also commissioned MORI to undertake research into the causes of poor satisfaction so that it can identify how to improve. While there are shortcomings in the Council's approach to customer access, it is aware of these issues and is actively seeking to understand and address them.

### Ease of access for all

- 41** Services are accessible, responsive and based on an understanding of local need. A range of access methods make it easy for local people to contact the Council. One stop shops at Worksop and Retford, in partnership with the County Council, provide a seamless service for local people to both district and County Council services. There are a further ten 'help points' located in rural areas where the Council works in partnership with voluntary agencies and parish councils to provide a range of services. Video links allow local people to speak to Council staff and some help points also have regular surgeries attended by district, county and A1 Housing Services staff. Over 6,000 visits a year are currently taking place closer to people's homes, dealing with service information, enquiries and more complex transactions such as benefits applications and issuing of 'blue badges' for parking for disabled people. Use of the help points can mean that some rural residents avoid the need for a five hour round trip on public transport to one of the Council's offices. A mobile advice unit operated in partnership with the County Council, police and a neighbouring district council also operates in rural areas.

## How good is the service?

- 42** Residents have good access to the Council by telephone. This is the preferred method of contacting the Council and contact telephone numbers for services are promoted widely through the Bassetlaw News, an A to Z of Council services, a 'welcome pack' that is provided to all new residents and on the website. Rather than have a single telephone number for the Council, a range of numbers for specific services are provided, together with the names and email addresses of contact officers. This may cause some confusion if residents are unsure which service they need to contact to deal with their enquiry. However, when tested calls to 'wrong numbers' were swiftly redirected to the correct service and staff were helpful and professional. Occasionally callers can receive voicemail messages if staff are unavailable to take their call. There is no corporate guidance to help minimise this and services manage call reception locally and inconsistently. The Council is introducing a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which should enable calls to be managed centrally and answered by an operator, but this is not yet fully operational. Telephone access hours have been extended with calls being routed through to the County Council switchboard between 5pm and 8pm on weekday evenings and Saturday mornings. While there is a potentially confusing range of telephone numbers for contacting the Council these are well publicised, available outside normal office hours and staffed by helpful operators who redirect the caller if the wrong number is called.
- 43** The Council is proactive in addressing the needs of users. It has undertaken a number of initiatives in response to the economic downturn. These include working with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Business Link to promote a 'buy local' campaign, conducting a small business rate relief trawl which identified £43,000 extra relief for 85 local businesses, and developing a financial inclusion strategy which promotes a joined-up approach between the Council, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and the Welfare Rights service for people with financial problems. The Council has reviewed the cashier service at its enquiry point in Harworth due in part to risks with lone worker security issues. To maintain access it worked with the Post Office and Pay Point network of local shops so that residents can now make cash payments at four alternative locations in the village. The Council is therefore responsive in addressing the changing needs of local people and to the need to support local businesses.
- 44** The Council's website is not fully effective. It was assessed as 'standard' in the SOCITM<sup>6</sup> 2009 assessment of council websites. This is the lowest of three classifications and 53 per cent of councils are at this level. The website has limited provision to allow residents to carry out electronic transactions with the Council. Payments such as council tax, business rates and rent can be made online via an external link but it is not possible, for example, to book a leisure class or arrange a bulky waste collection. The website contains a lot of information but much of this is in the form of previously published documents that are slow for users to download online. The Council is aware of these limitations and has a web development plan to address them. This includes upgrading the website to allow a greater range of direct payments and transactions and improved hosting of forms and documents. Actions are scheduled for completion by December 2009.

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<sup>6</sup> Society of Information Technology Management

**45** Information is not shared systematically across service units. A CRM system has been procured and is being piloted in Environment Services. This will allow the Council to better coordinate and manage customer enquiries. However, residents currently have to make separate contacts for cross-cutting enquiries and the Council is not aware of any multiple requests for service from individuals as they are recorded on separate systems. Systematic information sharing would enable the Council to deal with customer queries in a more effective and efficient way as well as providing a more joined-up service for residents.

### Standards

- 46** Clear service standards have been developed in consultation with local users. Proposed standards were discussed with the Citizens' Panel and amended to reflect the feedback received. The standards cover access issues, such as opening hours, waiting and response times and qualitative matters such as facilities provided at access points and behaviour of staff. Standards are publicised at receptions, on the website and via the Bassetlaw News. They are monitored by twice yearly mystery shopping exercises conducted by an external company. This shows good overall compliance with standards. For example, in the most recent survey there was 97 per cent compliance with the three minute waiting time at one stop shops with the average waiting time being 30 seconds. The number of enquiries that received a full answer was 78 per cent, slightly below the 80 per cent target. External monitoring enables the Council to monitor compliance with service standards and take remedial action where appropriate.
- 47** Ongoing monitoring of performance against standards is inconsistent. The telephone system allows the Council to monitor performance in responding to telephone calls, but response to letters and emails is monitored locally by services. The Council therefore does not have a clear corporate overview of performance in this area. Implementation of the CRM system should assist the Council in achieving this corporate overview.

### Engagement

**48** The Council has effective arrangements for consulting, engaging and communicating with local people. In partnership with the Bassetlaw Community and Voluntary Service it has identified 25 community groups that are representative of the wider population of the district. These include the Bassetlaw Over Fifties Forum, Focus on Young People in Bassetlaw, North Notts Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Development Group and parish councils. A 'link officer' has been appointed for each group who is either a head of service or a director within the Council. This demonstrates a corporate commitment to community engagement and provides a framework for feeding back the views and needs of community groups to the senior management of the Council. Although these arrangements are quite recent they are promoting effective dialogue between the Council and community groups and have already produced positive outcomes such as extending the period of parking for disabled people after this was raised as an area of concern.

## How good is the service?

- 49** Consultation and engagement is allowing residents to help shape the delivery of services. Manton Community Alliance (MCA) is a Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder<sup>7</sup> in a deprived ex-mining community which aims to help local people to influence local services so they are more responsive to their needs. As a result in Manton one in three local people have been engaged in identifying their priorities for the area. This has helped to inform the Manton Cleaner, Greener, Safer Neighbourhood Agreement. This sets out the levels of service that the Council will provide in response to local priorities, particularly around waste, litter, play areas and public spaces, and also the actions and behaviours that are expected from local people. This partnership approach with the community has promoted local awareness of the services the Council provides and how to access them and also improved the Council's understanding of what is important to local people. MCA received the Government's Neighbourhood Management Team of 2007 award for innovation, community engagement and leadership.
- 50** The Council is expanding the principles of participatory budgeting developed in Manton. Consultation with local people via the Bassetlaw News identified that the cleanliness of town centres was a priority. As a result an additional £100,000 has been allocated in the 2009/10 budget for town centre cleansing. The Council is also allocating £1,000 to each ward councillor to be spent on priorities identified by local people. Residents are therefore having a direct influence over the delivery of local services.
- 51** The Council is working to ensure that all sections of the community have opportunities to express their access needs and experiences. For example, it is developing its engagement with young people. A cabinet member has the role of young people's 'champion', with the aim of ensuring that young people's issues are amongst the priority issues being considered by the Council. In partnership with the LSP and in consultation with young people the Council has held a large multi-media event aimed at 13 to 15 year olds. This was designed to give young people the opportunity to access information, advice and support networks. The Council is working with Norfolk County Council via the Beacon peer mentoring scheme to enhance engagement with young people. This has resulted in the proposal to involve young people in the Council's scrutiny process and funding for a youth engagement worker on a part time basis. Engaging young people will help to ensure that their views are represented when planning Council services.

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<sup>7</sup> The Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder programme is a government-funded initiative that involves communities working with local agencies to improve services at neighbourhood level.

**52** The Council encourages and uses customer feedback and complaints effectively to improve service quality and access to services. In 2007 it re-branded its complaints, compliments and suggestions scheme as 'Speak Up, We're Listening'. It publicises this widely through posters and leaflets, on its website and in the Bassetlaw News. It also publicises the actions it takes in response to feedback, such as changing the street name of a new development, and its policy on this issue, after a local resident expressed concern that it would cause confusion with an existing street name. Action taken as a result of consultation with residents is published via a 'We asked... You said... We did...' feature. For example, the Council asked about opening hours and what would be the most convenient time for residents to visit and phone. The response was that people would like to phone in the evening and Saturday mornings rather than visit. As a result the Council provided an out of hour's calls service between 5pm to 8pm weekdays and 8am to midday on Saturday mornings. When asked about experiences with NHS dentists local people said there was a problem accessing dentists in Bassetlaw. A subsequent scrutiny review resulted in the PCT making premises and equipment available to attract newly qualified dentists to the district and has increased provision. Actively seeking the views of residents has enabled the Council to respond to their needs.

### Diversity

**53** The Council is making progress on diversity and equality issues. The Comprehensive Equality Plan includes the three equality schemes, the diversity and equality policy, and an equality action programme that is designed to achieve progression to level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government by December 2009 (the Council is currently at level 2 of the standard). Commitment to equality and diversity is evident at a senior level. The Leader of the Council is the Portfolio holder for Equalities supported by the Director of Corporate Services who has the lead management responsibility. A corporate structure for overseeing the delivery of the Council's equality and diversity objectives is in place. A Programme Board has responsibility for overseeing the Council's approach to achieve an improved rating against the Equality Standard. An Equality and Diversity Steering Group, consisting of the Heads of Service and representatives from A1 Housing, meets monthly to monitor delivery of the equalities action plan. There are equality champions in each service area who provide a network for undertaking equality impact assessments (EIAs) and incorporating emerging issues into service equality plans, which all service plans for 2009/10 are required to contain. Equality issues are identified in all Cabinet reports, there is a programme of training which includes equality impact assessments for managers and a compulsory equality and diversity interactive online training package for all staff. These arrangements are helping to ensure the Council is focused on equality and diversity issues when planning services.

## How good is the service?

- 54** The Council works with partners to address the needs of minority groups. The LSP New Community Group (NCG) was set up in response to the increasing numbers of migrant workers coming to Bassetlaw, predominantly from Poland. Using a grant of £150,000 from the Community Cohesion Fund over three years it is delivering a number of projects that include:
- producing 1,000 pocket-sized information leaflets in Polish;
  - developing a web-based information system which provides information in four community languages to meet local need;
  - training on the reporting and recording of hate crime; and
  - employing a short-term development worker to support Polish community development.
- 55** The Council has agreed to commission research to better understand the communities of Bassetlaw. This will build on the work undertaken by the New Communities Group and will examine the demographics of the area, migration patterns and access to services in relation to vulnerable groups. The research will forecast population changes and demand for services and assist the Council in planning services to meet the needs of minority groups.
- 56** The accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers in the district are not currently being fully met. In 2005 the Council carried out an accommodation needs survey of the gypsy and traveller community. This identified the need for an additional 43 caravan pitches in the district. The Council proposes to address this via the local development framework which is currently being revised. This means it could be another 18 months before any action is taken. As a result it will be some considerable time before the needs of a vulnerable section of the community are met.
- 57** People from deprived communities are often at greatest risk of disadvantage and exclusion and the Council is proactive in attempting to engage with these communities. The Sporting Chance and Footballing Chance projects work with young people who are socially excluded. The projects aim to encourage young people to take part in physical activity, eat more healthily and to move away from alcohol, smoking and taking drugs. More recently the projects have encouraged young people back into education and help them gain a wide range of qualifications, with 20 conducting voluntary work in the community, 12 attending work placements in leisure environments and nine continuing into paid employment.
- 58** The Council's performance regarding equality and diversity Best Value Performance Indicators is relatively poor. The Council is performing above average in its duty to promote race equality, but is below average for the percentage of BME staff as a ratio of the working population. It is in the worst 25 per cent of Councils for the percentage of women in senior management positions within the Council and the percentage of staff with disabilities. The Council acknowledges that its staff are not representative of the community it serves and has put plans in place to address this, such as a more targeted approach to advertising vacancies. It is also engaging with the 25 community groups to help ensure that services reflect the needs of all sections of the community.

- 59** The Council uses equalities and diversity legislation effectively. There are effective employee monitoring mechanisms in place and equalities issues are integrated in key training courses, such as customer service training, service level planning preparation, performance development reviews and recruitment and selection. Most managers, staff and councillors have now undergone specific equalities and diversity training.
- 60** The Council is facilitating access to electronic information for the wider community. The SOCITM survey found that the website access arrangements take account of diversity issues, with information on access keys, ability to change fonts and colour, and details of translation facilities. Provision of accessible technology improves access for the majority of the community.

### Service Outcomes

- 61** A range of service outcomes have improved access to services for local people. The Council's objectives and aspirations for customer access are clear and well known by service managers, staff and councillors. The Access Strategy sets out a clear commitment to create a customer-focused organisation. A range of outcomes have been delivered for customers, such as the one stop shops and help points. The ABC programme builds on existing achievements through projects such as CRM and website development, targeting improved customer satisfaction and increased involvement of local people in the planning of services. The Council is therefore clear on the aims, objectives and delivery plans for customer access and can demonstrate progress.
- 62** The Council works effectively with partners to deliver improved outcomes for specific access needs. Examples are as follows.
- The One Stop Shops and help points are delivered with the County Council, voluntary groups and parish councils. Together they provide a broad range of information and referral services to customers.
  - In conjunction with school developments by the County Council the Council provided investment of £11 million for two new leisure centres that opened in 2008.
  - The Preventative Adaptation Scheme, in partnership with the County Council, PCT and A1 Housing, provides adaptations such as grab handles, stair rails and half steps to help elderly people stay safe and independent in their own homes. 487 residents have benefited from the service with 98 per cent saying the service was good or very good.
- 63** These and similar initiatives provide a broad means to address, fund and deliver consistent and improving information, referral and access to services. They also help the delivery of Council and LAA objectives.

## How good is the service?

- 64** Processes for handling complaints and learning from complaints are effective. A residents' satisfaction survey undertaken in 2008 shows that there has been a significant improvement in the satisfaction of local people with the way the Council handles their complaints. The Council has expanded the corporate complaints and comments system to provide an online reporting facility. Services report monthly and the Council can show that it uses feedback from complainants to identify service improvements. For example, following complaints about the approach of bailiffs who carry out work on behalf of the Council they were requested to adopt a more sympathetic style.
- 65** The Council works effectively across traditional service boundaries to deliver a more accessible and customer-focused service. For example, the joint approach with A1 Housing, the CAB and Worksop Credit Union means that rather than just pursue residents for rent and council tax arrears it can also refer them for debt advice and more affordable credit.
- 66** The Council is working collaboratively with the business community to improve access to enhanced services. A recent land sale agreement with Tesco has resulted in a £12 million receipt for the Council. Of this £2.6 million is earmarked for a cinema and leisure facility in Worksop and other planned projects include upgrading CCTV in the two town centres, upgrading recycling sites, introducing a green waste collection, supporting local business through a new Enterprise Centre for Retford and environmental improvements. This will enable the Council to invest in improved services against the backdrop of a national economic downturn.

### User Experience

- 67** User satisfaction with Council services is mixed. In 2006/07 16 satisfaction indicators were collected. Half were above average with over one third in the top quartile. The benefits and planning services have high levels of customer satisfaction, but waste and recycling, sports and leisure and parks and open spaces have relatively poor user satisfaction. Overall satisfaction with the Council matches the worst performing 25 per cent of councils. The Council has commissioned MORI to research the reasons for residents' perceptions through consultation so that it can identify and address the causes of poor satisfaction. It has increased the number of editions of Bassetlaw News to six per year in order to promote its services and successes to local people. It is also attempting to develop a more constructive relationship with the local media.
- 68** Users' experiences of accessing Council services and their perceptions of the Council are mixed. A focus group of residents felt that parks and gardens are well maintained (which is in contrast to the satisfaction indicators), and that the refuse collection service is efficient with friendly and helpful staff. Users stated that the Council keeps the area clean and is responsive to reports of littering, although it was felt that enforcement powers are not used sufficiently to tackle issues such as flytipping. Residents appreciated being able to pay their council tax bill at certain shops and it was felt that the website was useful and enabled good consultation on planning issues. Frontline staff were said to be friendly and helpful. However concerns were expressed about difficulties in making bookings at leisure centres; a replacement of football pitches with tennis courts and multi-use pitches that were felt to be less well used; and poor provision of athletics facilities in the district.

- 69** There are good levels of service at the one stop shops and help points. Reception areas are welcoming and user friendly with a range of useful leaflets and posters and good disabled access. Checks revealed that the Council performs well in responding to customer enquiries. Enquiries all received a prompt and helpful response.

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### Is the service delivering value for money?

- 70** The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of March 2009 highlights that the Council is making steady progress with achievement of value for money (VFM) with a strong emphasis on service review and performance management which will support future improvement. The Council has made good progress with the development of new arrangements to monitor and review value for money. These include the instigation of regular service reviews to assess progress against best practice and known benchmarks and also monitor budget, cost, satisfaction and performance. Service reviews are providing a high level of challenge and are making an impact on understanding and improving value for money. The Council is improving its understanding of its costs. Spend is in line with strategic priorities. There are, however, inconsistencies in service performance and some low satisfaction with performance. Although there is low council tax, there are some high service costs and un-apportioned overheads which are undergoing urgent review.
- 71** Significant efficiency savings have been achieved. In 2008/09 service reviews generated £0.79 million efficiency savings on a net budget of £15.9 million. This equates to 4.9 per cent - double the national efficiency target. Bassetlaw was able to keep its council tax increase to 2.5 per cent, compared to the national average of 3.5 per cent. For 2009/10 a further £0.76 million efficiency savings have been identified, enabling the council tax increase to be held at 2.5 per cent and allowing additional resources to be targeted at local priorities, such as £100,000 for town centre cleansing. Efficiencies have also been achieved in relation to reductions in sickness absence, increases in council tax collected and transactional efficiency in housing benefit work. Revenue and capital investment is based on the strategic priorities of the Council and any value for money savings are invested in priority areas. Procurement is effective and the Council supports and initiates procurement work with other partners, such as joint procurement of refuse collection vehicles.
- 72** The Council works actively with partners to improve VFM in relation to access to services. Partnership with the County Council at one stop shops allows services to be extended and costs to be shared. Funding of voluntary sector partners has allowed the Council to extend the range and provision of services and the development of service level agreements enables the quality of services to be clearly specified and monitored.

# What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

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## What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 73** The Council's track record for delivering improvements in access to services is good. Effective partnership working is delivering improvements in line with corporate priorities and to meet local needs. The Council responds well to internal and external reviews and has a good track record of delivering efficiencies and improving value for money. Improvements in performance in terms of customer satisfaction are poor but the Council has recognised this as a weakness and is taking steps to address service improvements and gain a better understanding of the issues. The rate of improvement as evidenced by performance indicators (PIs) is average overall and the CRM project has been slow to deliver benefits to the community.
- 74** The Council has a good track record of delivering improvements for users in accessing services. Well established One Stop Shops in the two main town centres of Retford and Worksop provide access to district and county council services in one place with staff able to deal with a range of enquires. Implementation of a 'Customer First Programme' with £50,000 investment over two years delivered new customer standards, an access strategy and achievement of level 2 of the equality standard. The current ABC programme builds on the success of the Customer First Programme and the focus on easy to reach services, satisfied customers and involved people has resulted in better complaints handling, and a 'Speak up - we're listening' campaign to encourage local feedback. This means that customers are aware of the standards of service they can expect from the Council and have more opportunities to influence how those services are delivered. However slow progress in the delivery of the CRM project has hampered the ability to deal effectively with some telephone enquires.
- 75** Investment in facilities has led to improvements in the quality of services for local residents. The refurbishment of the Bassetlaw Museum and Education Resource Centre included significant improvements in access arrangements. The investment of £11 million in two new leisure centres means that local residents have the opportunity to use improved, modern facilities. However, partners have been slow to agree the arrangements for community access and there is currently no reception staffing or booking facilities at the schools. The Council has attempted to resolve this problem by allowing access via the leisure centre building, but this is not ideal and it is not a solution that is available at both sites. Usage of leisure facilities is good with 416,792 individual facility uses for the first three quarters of the year. However access could be improved through better reception facilities.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 76** The Council and its partners have improved poorly performing services. The 2007 Audit Commission inspection showed that A1 Housing had improved from a poor, '0' star service with uncertain prospects to a good, two star service with promising prospects for improvement. Improvements include extended access to housing repairs services, adaptations for disabled customers and improved communications.
- 77** The Council has a track record of effective work with partners to ensure value for money in access to services. For example, rurality is a key issue for Bassetlaw and the Council has established a network of service 'hubs' and videolink access points to improve the accessibility of advice and information services in some of the most rural isolated areas. This has been achieved through partnership with a range of local organisations such as Bassetlaw Citizens Advice Bureau, Bircotes Learning and Information Network, Langold Resource Centre, Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottinghamshire Rural Community Council and Tuxford Mine of Information Ltd. Residents are able to obtain direct access to benefits advice; health advice and a range of other services which helps alleviate social exclusion and saves on unnecessary journeys to town centres.
- 78** The Council has a generally positive direction of travel in relation to best value performance indicators (PIs) although improvement in access related PIs is mixed. Satisfaction rates were average in 2006/07 and an IPSOS MORI Tracker survey in 2007 showed satisfaction deteriorating in the majority of indicators. The Council is trying new ways of engaging service users to improve satisfaction and is investing in research into the reasons for poor satisfaction.
- 79** The Council's medium-term financial strategy, budgets and capital programme are soundly based and designed to deliver its strategic priorities. A robust approach to delivering efficiency savings and medium term financial planning led to savings of £1.5 million over the last 18 months. At the same time council tax increases have been relatively low and the Council has invested in local priorities and increased community engagement. The Council has recently achieved success in the Government Business Awards 2009. Its financial performance was recognised for delivering efficiency savings, developing value for money, engaging with the community on budgets and medium term financial planning.

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## How well does the service manage performance?

- 80** Performance management arrangements are improving and scrutiny is effectively challenging performance and decision making. Access to services is clearly understood by the Council and is supported by visible leadership and ambitious plans based on an understanding of local needs. However plans are not always SMART and they lack clear measurable outcomes that would enable the Council to be clear about the difference they are making for local people.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 81** There is visible leadership for improving access to services. Councillors and senior managers have a clear understanding of access to services and have communicated this with staff and partners. The Access Strategy sets out the vision for the area with a range of objectives and actions under five key themes through which it seeks to enhance access to services. Internal communications have been improved with investment in communication workshops and the introduction of an employee recognition scheme to celebrate success. External messages around Council priorities and improvements have been developed including increased publications of Bassetlaw News and improvements to the website.
- 82** The Council's planning arrangements support a focus on improving access to services, but plans do not always provide clear measures to demonstrate the impact they will make. There is a clear link from the community and corporate plans to service plans and individual performance. However plans currently lack clear outcomes and action plans are generally not SMART. The Corporate plan sets out priorities and flagship projects and service plans are developing with new plans for 2009/10 including a full view of the service in relation to workforce planning, risk management, equality and diversity, finance, asset management and consultation and engagement. However, without outcome measures and SMART objectives the Council will not be clear about what difference it is making in the priority areas that are important to local people. The Council has recognised this and the current corporate plan refresh is developing a clearer focus on outcomes.
- 83** Plans are based on assessments of need through consultation and address both national and local issues. Stakeholders are being increasingly engaged in the development of plans. Link Officers have been introduced to liaise with the top 25 community groups and a new communities group has been established in response to the increasing number of migrant workers in the area. Local research undertaken by SOCITM identified customer preferences and as a result appropriate plans to improve telephony, internet and face to face channels have been developed. Evaluation of projects such as the help points provided information on the number of times the centres are used and how effectively they are meeting the needs of the rural communities. The views of local people are increasingly being reflected in plans.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 84** The Council has improved its approach to performance management. Management teams, heads of service and the Performance Improvement Scrutiny Committee (PISC) undertake quarterly service performance clinics. These provide management information to increase officer and councillor understanding of how services are performing. The clinics are aimed at creating greater ownership and accountability for performance management as well as recognising good performance and where improvements need to be made. The reporting structure sets out clearly where progress has been made against plans within directorates. Monthly monitoring of key performance indicators tracks where performance needs to be addressed. Quarterly monitoring of progress against the Council's twelve key strategies, including the Access Strategy, is undertaken by the management team. There is clearly a focus on reviewing progress against plans and performance information is improving. However, a focus on reporting by directorate and separate monitoring of strategies means there is a risk that an overview of progress against corporate priorities and flagship projects is not fully realised. The Council has recognised that plans to date have generally been internally focused and new plans will develop an outward focus which will help to ensure that performance management recognises what difference the Council is making for local people.
- 85** Project management is improving. Prince 2 project management principles were introduced for the key projects within the Customer First programme. This meant that each project had a project manager from the Corporate Management Team with the overall programme being managed by a Director. The programme successfully delivered the project objectives and provided a basis on which to develop the Access Strategy. Service level agreements have been introduced and are being used to help ensure that the Council and partners are clear about what partnerships are delivering and how this will support delivery of corporate priorities. Enhanced clarity and responsibility for the delivery of projects means that the Council is better placed to ensure that the expected benefits will be delivered.
- 86** Scrutiny is being used effectively to provide challenge to the decision making process. Reviews on a range of issues have led to improvements in services that impact on local residents. For example, review of the provision of play areas in the district led to a better understanding of community provision and needs. This led to a successful bid for funding to develop play facilities and new facilities have now been installed in some rural areas.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

**87** The Council actively seeks feedback and learns from others in order to improve services. There are numerous examples of how the Council learns from others. For example:

- tools for improvement such as mystery shopping, have been used to identify weaknesses in customer services and have led to improvements such as waiting time and signage in receptions;
- accreditation to national quality schemes such as Quest and Green Flag ensures that the Council is aware of national standards and the assessment process is used to make improvements;
- an IDeA<sup>8</sup> peer review in March 2008 provided evidence and recommendations which are being acted upon; and
- the Manton Community Alliance has provided the Council with experience of engaging with communities. The Council has adopted some practices such as participatory budgeting by seeking local views on priorities for Council spending.

**88** This shows that the Council is self-aware and open to learning from others in order to help improve services.

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## Does the service have the capacity to improve?

**89** There are appropriate financial and human resources in place to deliver improvements to access to services. The Council is building on recent investments and learning from others. Effective partnership working is increasing the Council's capacity to reach those made more vulnerable by their circumstances and external funding is being used to deliver improvements.

**90** There is good officer capacity to improve customer access. Implementation of the Human Resources (HR) strategy 'Valuing our People', has improved leadership capacity, recruitment and retention of staff and communications. The Council has reduced the levels of sickness absence, achieved 'Investors in People'<sup>9</sup> status, and 100 per cent of staff received individual appraisals last year. This means that staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are developing skills to deliver their plans effectively. The new HR strategy will focus further on building capacity and workforce planning is being developed through the service planning process.

**91** There is a strong focus on improvement and the capacity of senior management has been strengthened. A new, restructured senior management team provides the Council with new and up to date skills and knowledge to achieve the changes it wants. Senior managers are project sponsors of the flagship projects within the corporate plan which have implications for improving access to services and include the Customer Standards project. Directors have also been given the role of 'Link Officer' to ensure that they are engaging with the community and voluntary sector around access issues. The Access to Bassetlaw programme sets out a vision for 'Easy to Reach Services', 'Satisfied Customers' and 'Involved People'. This demonstrates a clear commitment from senior management to improve access to services.

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<sup>8</sup> IDEA is the improvement and Development agency of the Local Government Association.

<sup>9</sup> Investors in People is a nationally recognised standard that accredits organisations that achieve success through their people.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 92** Councillors are developing their skills, attitudes and resources to deliver improved access. The Council has signed up to the East Midlands Councillor Development Charter. Job descriptions are in place for most roles and personal development reviews and mentoring are being introduced. The Council has invested in councillor development through the Local Government Association community leaders programme and councillors are helping to drive the access agenda, for example, through the IT and Access Sub-group where progress against the IT and access strategies are challenged. Councillors are being given additional resources through ward budgets to target ward based priorities and good relations with parish councils have also led to support for local communities.
- 93** Effective financial management means the Council is well placed to deliver planned improvements to access to services. Robust service reviews were used to identify efficiency savings and a 'Star Chamber' process has increased understanding of how financial resources can be directed at priorities. Cabinet agreed a service improvement package of £0.6 million in August 2008 and an additional £0.225 million in February 2009 for projects which will all directly impact on service users and the wider community. This improvement in financial management and planning means that the resources are in place to deliver on the corporate plan priorities.
- 94** The Council is using partnerships to deliver access improvements. The Council established BISCUIT (Bassetlaw Information Service Using IT) in 2000 and was successful in a bid to the Legal Services Commission (Partnership Innovation Budget). As a result a network of service 'hubs' and videolink access points were established to improve the accessibility of advice and information services in rural areas. These have been delivered and continue to be developed through a strong partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau, parish councils and other voluntary organisations. Work with parish councils is helping to enhance facilities in rural areas. For example the Council has worked with a number of parishes to secure external funding to improve and develop play facilities. The Council is also engaging effectively with the LSP and is currently working with the Credit Union, CAB and A1 Housing to produce a Financial Inclusion Strategy that will support local people through the economic downturn. This commitment to partnership working enhances the Council's capacity to improve services for local people and maximises opportunities to attract external funding.
- 95** The Council's approach to procurement is adequate and external funding is used to support service improvements. Procurement initiatives have achieved some good savings, particularly where this has been undertaken in conjunction with partners such as the purchasing of refuse collection vehicles. Access to external funding is maximised, for example, a rural officer post working in partnership with Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire, has generated £411,000 external funding to meet the needs of rural communities in Bassetlaw. The Council has successfully negotiated receipts of around £12 million from Tesco which will provide capital funding for a range of projects and also enable further access to European funding. The Council recognises that more could be done to improve efficiency and effectiveness. It is exploring the potential for developing a Leisure Trust to deliver increased funding and improved services. It also plans to review alternative ways of delivering the waste collection service. The Council is successfully attracting external funding and continuing to review opportunities to improve access to services.

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