

# What the inspectors have told us

Local government is going through a change process initiated by central government, designed to improve the quality of services and outcomes for local people.

The process starts with a self-assessment and concludes with an inspection by the Audit Commission, known as Comprehensive Performance Assessment, or CPA for short. Rochford's inspection was undertaken in February 2004 but the outcome was not known when we produced our Performance Plan last year. Below is a summary of the process, how we were rated, and what we are now doing to address the weaknesses identified during the inspection.

Each local authority has been assessed to determine its

- Ambition
- Prioritisation
- Focus
- Capacity
- Performance Management
- Achievement of service quality
- Achievement of improvement
- Investment
- Learning
- Future Plans

From this assessment, an overall rating is given of excellent, good, fair, weak or poor. We were disappointed to be given a rating of weak, particularly as satisfaction levels are high and, as a relatively small authority, we provide a comprehensive range of services without the resources available to many other councils. The overall conclusions from the inspection team were

## Our strengths

- We provide some good quality services, such as leisure and income collection
- Overall, public satisfaction is high
- We improve capacity by working well in partnership with other organisations
- We are successful in attracting external funding

## Our weaknesses

- There is insufficient articulation of our overall ambition, with due weight being given to national priorities
- Our planning documents are not linked together to provide a structured framework for what we want to do
- The role of Committee Members is under-developed

- There is insufficient engagement with the public around needs and priority setting
- Capacity needs to be developed
- Improvement is needed on services provided to vulnerable people
- We do not have a performance management culture

As a consequence of these findings, we have now developed an action plan and are working with the inspectors to deliver it. The key actions and dates for delivering key milestones are:

Produce a 'fit for purpose' Housing Strategy	April 2005
Evaluate existing consultation outcomes	April 2005
Revise our Consultation and Communications Strategy	April 2005
Commence implementation of a revised organisation structure	July 2005
Improve performance of the homelessness service and develop the housing advice service	September 2005
Identify effectiveness of existing partnerships	November 2005
Produce a cost base for services to enable an assessment of value for money	December 2005

Develop key objectives and targets to deliver our long term vision of making the district the place of choice in the county to live, work and visit	April 2006
Adopt a revised Local Plan	April 2006
Secure improvements in the Housing Benefit service	April 2006
Develop a performance management system encompassing risk management	March 2006
Develop the role of overview and scrutiny in the Committee process	May 2006
Develop the role of Committee Members, particularly relating to decision-making, chairmanship and leadership capacity	May 2006
Review the operation of the Planning Committee	May 2006
Update the Community Strategy	March 2007
Implement an Essex-wide strategy for waste collection	April 2008
Implement chosen option for the future management of social housing stock in the district	April 2008
Update all strategies and plans to eliminate gaps and overlaps, and to develop linkages between them	December 2008

Implement a Workforce Development, focussing on the training and development of members and staff to enable effective leadership and delivery of services	Ongoing with many milestones
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Some of these activities have now been completed – we have a new Housing Strategy, our recent consultations have been evaluated (see section 5) and our homelessness service has dealt with a large backlog and turned their performance around, to enable us to meet higher targets in the years ahead, and now look at the effectiveness of our housing advice.

We have submitted a bid to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to obtain funds to enable us to buy-in the expertise to help us progress some of these actions and the outcome from this bid is expected shortly.

Some of the activities are simply ‘work in progress’ because continuous improvement is our goal: when we reach one milestone, we need to set another.

And finally, we cannot do it all by ourselves. An activity such as the implementation of a new waste strategy is shared by many organisations. We can only do our bit and encourage others to do theirs. This is a leading-edge scheme and there will be many hurdles to jump. The pitfalls cannot always be foreseen and to some extent we will have to learn as we go along, using risk management to try and minimise any uncertainty.

In October of this year, the Audit Commission will review our progress to determine our ‘direction of travel’.

We are awaiting details of the format and timetable for future assessments.