

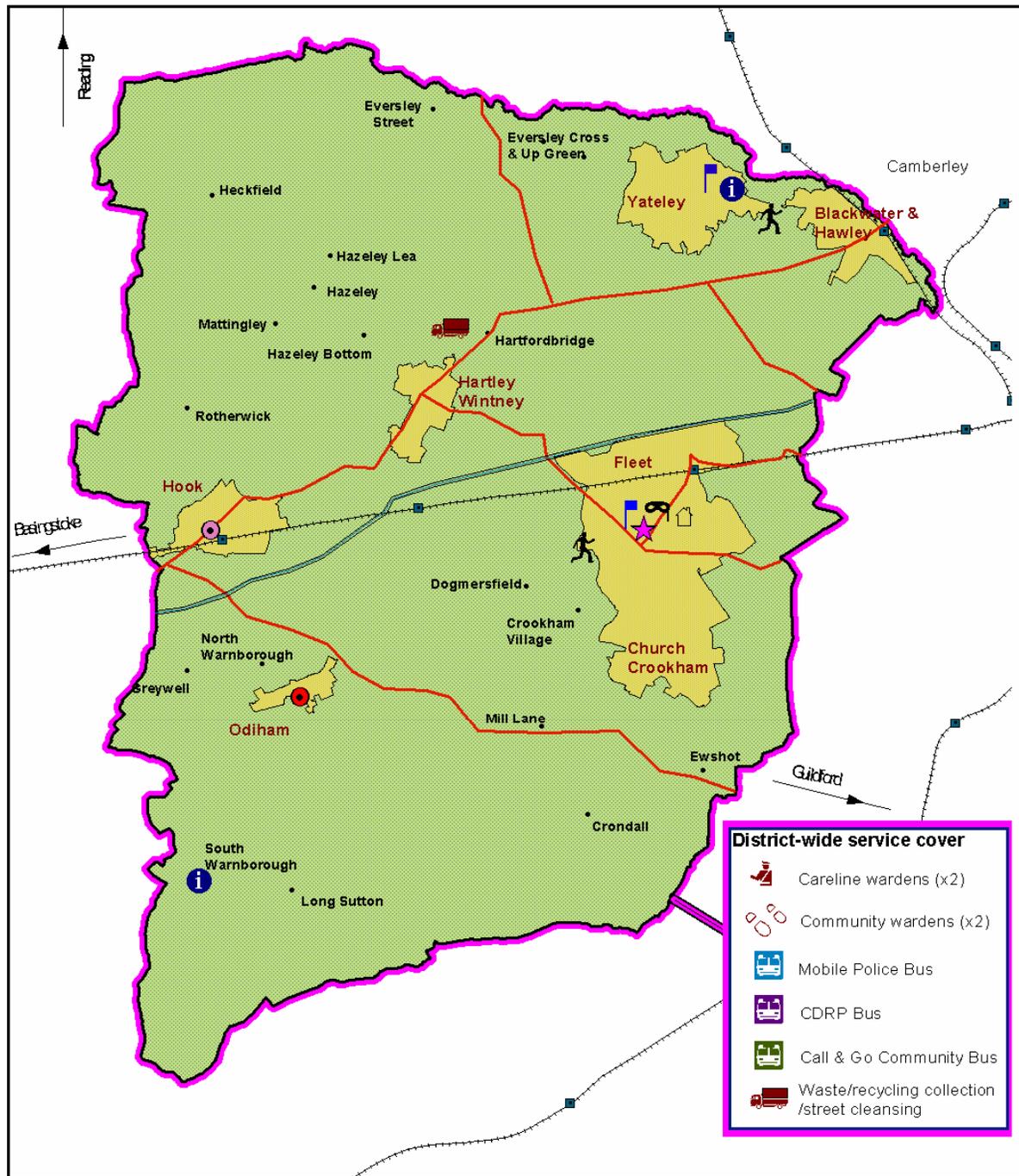


Customer Access Inspection Self Assessment

December 2004



FIGURE 1 Hart District Council - Contact Points



KEY:

★ Hart DC Civic Offices	ⓘ Information Points (kiosks)
🚶 Leisure Centres	🏠 Citizen Advice Bureaux
🎭 Harlington Centre (Including: 🎬, 🎮, Entertainment & cinema)	🛒 Odiham One Stop shop
🏠 Housing Association (Sentinel)	🚪 Hook One Stop shop (under development)
🚚 Public spaces depot	🚆 Railways
	🚉 Railway stations
	🛣️ Main roads

N
1: 100,000

Hart District Council (C) - 2004

Self Assessment - Focus on Customer Access: Hart District Council - December 2004

1.0 Introduction and Context

1.1 This introduction sets out Hart District Council's approach to improving its focus on customer care in the context of the wider improvement agenda for local Councils and following its CPA inspection in 2003.

Corporate Plan

1.2 The Council's Corporate Plan (January 2004) establishes the Council's purpose:

"...to secure the best possible services, that are locally determined, at affordable prices for the benefit of the whole community".

1.3 The Plan establishes the Council's values as:

- Low Taxation
- Freedom of choice
- Supportive Intervention
- **Excellent customer service**
- Enhancing the quality of life of the whole community.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

1.4 The CPA report (January 2004) concluded -

"Standards of customer care are inconsistent and the Council has yet to develop a comprehensive corporate approach to ensure that it makes full use of user and staff feedback. This is important in ensuring that all users receive a consistently good standard of service and that customers are actively involved in helping to shape service to meet their needs. The Council recognises this and is taking appropriate action to implement a new corporate complaints system and commence a cross-cutting review of customer service."

1.5 Learning - The Council accepted the findings of this report in that it should prioritise its efforts to improve customer care, improve capacity for service delivery and service improvement.

1.6 The high level Improvement Plan, approved in September 2004, confirmed that "Hart is committed to continuous improvement...The primary aim of this (plan) is to improve services for its customers." One of the three main strands of the plan was identified as:

"Putting our customers at the heart of everything we do".

Focus on Improvement - Rationale for Project C

1.7 The rationale for restructuring the Authority at management level is grounded in a desire to promote continuous improvement throughout the organisation. Silo based business units have been

replaced by a Leadership Team made up of Chief Executive and 3 Corporate Directors. This has helped to provide corporate capacity, for instance, one of the Corporate Directors is taking the lead on improving customer care throughout the Council.

1.8 In order to make effective and sustained improvement in customer service it has been recognised that a change of culture is required. As such, for it to become embedded throughout the organisation, improvement is seen as part of a continuous process, rather than a discrete piece of work.

1.9 It is evident that performance is inconsistent across the Council and this was confirmed by the User Satisfaction Surveys undertaken during 2003/4. Some centres of excellence have been evidenced through charter mark, ISO 9001(2000), Beacon status and other national awards. More recently IIP re-accreditation has been achieved. In other areas there are operational issues which have affected the level of service provided. This was never more so than in respect of refuse collection. It is recognised that any drive towards customer care needed to take into account the wider issues of service improvement if it is to be perceived as meaningful by the wider community.

1.10 There is a need to focus the Council's limited resources in order to maximise impact and facilitate the embedding of culture change. In order to do this the Council has looked to two linked areas - learning from others and the e-government agenda to develop capacity.

1.11 Hart's e-Government Strategy (July 2003) supports this approach through transforming the organisation (Theme 1) and improving the delivery of services to customers (Theme 2).

Theme 1: Transforming the Organisation

Aims:

- Move as one – all staff and members understanding the Council's vision and direction
- Work in partnership with other organisations to deliver joint mechanisms for service delivery
- To look for cost effective ways of providing existing communications technology
- Improve employee satisfaction by enhancing ways of flexible working through the use of technology

Theme 2: Improving the Delivery of Services to Customers

Aims:

- Provide consistent levels of service to customers with a high standard of quality e.g. given 'right first time' answers to customer queries
- Provide efficient services, which give value for money
- Provide information and services in a way that make sense to the customer, that are joined up

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and seamless – e.g. services online that are geared around customer needs and not the structure of departments

- Improve access and availability of information and services e.g. access geared towards the disabled and enhancing accessibility through one-stop shops in community locations
- Add value to customer interactions by listening and anticipating their needs

1.12 'Project C' was identified as the over-arching branding for the culture change programme. The 'C' stands for customers first and foremost but encapsulates consultation, contentment (customer satisfaction), community engagement, capacity, use of IT (Customer Relationship Mgmt, tracking and reporting), communication, consistency and learning from complaints.

1.13 High level commitment has been given to 'Project C' from the outset from Leadership Team, Heads Of Service the Cabinet Member for People & Partnerships, Cabinet and Council.

1.14 Additionally, the ethos and overall aims of 'Project C' have been cascaded throughout the organisation through a number of different mechanisms, set out in the project plan.

1.15 Initiatives underway include:

- An Operational Review of Front Office Services
- Development of two kiosks and support for two one-stop shops in some of the more isolated parts of the District.
- Improving the use of our complaints procedure to capture feedback, to enable learning and service improvement.
- New customer care charter.
- Customer care and complaints training.
- Improving the customer experience however they contact the Council by introducing Customer Relationship Management and contact centre arrangements. (Including upgrade of telephony system and a Fastmail Review).
- Improving customer contact knowledge and management reporting through a front and back office CRM facility
- Plans to develop a more inter-active web-site following consideration of the most appropriate access channels for our customers.
- Investment into and implementation of works in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (eg. Fleet Pond, Benefits Counter).

2.0 How easy is it to access services?

2.1 Customers contact the Council and its services via a number of access channels - but we recognise

that there is scope for improvement. Services can be accessed via:

- Electronic information points including Catalogue of Services (kiosks at South Warnborough and Yateley)
- Physical access
- Telephone
- Paper based communication.
- Access channels available are:
 - Email,
 - Website
- Odiham One stop shop (Hook due – Autumn 2005)

2.3 The Council is able to offer service information in other languages, large print, audio and Braille formats when requested. It also offers signing if requested at public meetings and type talk is available to our housing customers via Sentinel. The Council is currently considering implementing language line.

2.4 Linked to accessibility is the promotion of our service activities and contact details. The Council uses a variety of publications and leaflets to advertise its services throughout the district, including Hart News, A-Z of services and our website.

Physical access

2.5 The Civic Offices in Fleet is the Council's headquarters and main point of contact for all access channels.¹ Although the main office is in a central location, the Council recognises that this is not always convenient for customers not living in Fleet.

2.6 The Council's reception staff are helpful and well informed and provide a vital 'first port of call' to all of our customers who visit the civic offices. Queue Busters posters appear in reception to provide signposts to topical information i.e. flooding (winter) and elections (May)

2.7 These facilities are well signed and allow easy access into the buildings including disabled access. They are fitted with hearing loops in public areas for our customers who are hard of hearing. The Council has recently installed an accessible reception counter for the customers of our benefit service, to enable easier, quicker access to this priority service.

2.8 The Council supports 'Call & Go' - an on demand community transport service, to enable customers who do not have, or cannot use alternative forms of transport, to key services and facilities. Radar Keys are also available from the Council offices for access to disabled toilets in the district.

¹ Refer to map Figure 1 for all of our contact points in the district

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- 2.9 Officers are available to deal with face to face enquiries for services without appointment, including making visits to customers where appropriate. The Council also operates appointment-based meetings and planning surgeries.
- 2.10 Access to our leisure centres is recognised as being good - offering activities for all ages, abilities and social backgrounds. Improvements over the last 4 years have meant that ILAM² satisfaction levels are top quartile and this reflects good customer access and experience.

Telephone

- 2.11 Our switchboard is the first line of contact for most calls to the civic offices but capacity is limited and in times of great demand the accessibility through our switchboard is inconsistent. The Council also operates direct dial facilities in all of its key services to support access.
- 2.12 Direct 24 hour access via the telephone is restricted to Careline and homelessness services. The Council uses a service call centre for recording noise complaints out of hours and sign posts other emergency situations via the main Council number. Partner agencies like the police interact with CCTV Control to deliver emergency services to the community and to support the co-ordination of the emergency planning process.
- 2.13 The Planning Service operates a telephone help desk with dedicated operators. The Benefits Service supplements normal answering service with a local rate information line.
- 2.14 The Elections telephone registration system (introduced for 2003 canvassing) allows residents to automatically re-register their confirm their electoral details. In previous years temporary staff had been employed to key in canvass forms during this period, the new system removed this need. The implementation of internet registration is being considered for next year.

Web & Email

- 2.15 The Council has had a website since 1997. Most services have web pages giving service information and contact details.
- 2.16 All Councillors have dedicated pages on the website with their contact details listed, including email addresses.
- 2.17 All officers have a personal e-mail address and service email addresses are also used and publicised, such as 'elections@hart.gov.uk'.

Service email addresses are listed on the web site and in our A-Z leaflet.

Points of Access (see map)

- 2.18 Through the Council's e-government aspirations and partnership working a number of projects have begun to enhance access to services particularly in areas known to suffer from rural isolation.³
- 2.19 The Council has deployed two touch screen kiosks; one in Yateley Citizen's Advice Bureau and one in South Warnborough Village shop. The kiosks are self service and DDA compliant, enabling customers to explore content at their leisure.
- 2.20 Leaflets on Council services are made available through outposts in the district, such as libraries, Citizen's Advice Bureaux, etc.
- 2.21 These are pilot projects, giving access to the 'Catalogue of Services' – a combined listing of District and County Council services. It is a part of a wider Hampshire & Isle of Wight E-Partnership project to make services more accessible.
- 2.22 The Council is also working with its partners to provide one-stop shops in Odiham and Hook, which will provide manned assistance to access information and services. The Hook facility will also provide community and agency services in support of the aims of the Local Strategic Partnership and the Community Plan.
- 2.23 Community Wardens are to be introduced in 2005 who will operate as the eyes and ears of the local community feeding back information on complaints and concerns and fast tracking access to services.
- 2.24 The Council operates a free Internet point for its customers in the civic offices, along with a 'Paypoint' machine which can accept payment for all Council service charges as well as Council tax and ATMs at its leisure sites.

How we can improve:

- Access audit – undertake a customer access audit to map service accessibility across the Council.
- Work with partners to extend contact opportunities
- To use service review results to re-engineer and streamline business processes within the Council
- Then use the audit and customer feedback to enhance access and improve consistency.
- Establish translation line ('Language line')
- Establish corporate approach to consultation and marketing and use this to engage all parts of the community.
- Exploit services that have extensive everyday contact with our customers

² ILAM - Institute of Leisure & Amenity Management

³ According to the index of deprivation 2004

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3 Is the Council using e-government to support access to service?

3.1 In recent years the expectations of our customers have risen along with technological advancements. From surveys⁴ conducted in the area, over 70% of our customers have access to the Internet either from work or home – well above the national average.

3.2 The Council is making steady progress by embracing the systems that will change the face of service delivery. A good example is Planning Online where the Council e-enabled its planning service in 2003, in response to direct feedback from its customers through its best value review. The system not only gives access to planning applications but also enables customers to make formal comments.

3.3 Like Councils across the country, Hart is using IEG funds to enhance access to information and services for its customers. So far it has invested in the following:

- **GIS** – The Council invested £300K in a corporate system to enable the management and storage of 80% of the Council's information. The Council is now working to provide customers with a wealth of geographically based information that can be accessed and used online.
- **Leisure** – The Council invested £80K in a leisure system that will form the basis for an online bookings service.
- **Website** – The Council is investing in a new website, with content management tools and transactional capabilities including eforms and epayment facilities (under Project C).
- **Kiosks** – DDA compliant and touch screen to encourage those who do not use technology – helping to close the digital divide

3.4 The Council is working towards the e-government target of December 2005 e-enablement. Current performance on BV157 is 48%.

Online consultation

3.5 Over the last two years the Council has used the web site to engage customers, giving their feedback and views on a variety of topics.

3.6 To further this work, the Council has invested in a database driven survey service, which enables the Council to publish surveys online and to receive the feedback electronically.

3.7 Recent examples of online questionnaires have been licensing, public spaces (PPG17). Access to

services, Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and race equality consultations will take place during January 2005. It has also been agreed that Hart will use this facility to promote strategic consultation such as the South East Regional Plan

Quality of the web

3.8 The Council's website has been developed in-house over a number of years. The Council is aware that the site does not currently provide the platform to fully e-enable its services.

3.9 Although the flexibility of the current website is limited, the addition of planning online and the consultation service is helping access to services. Other sections of the website enable customers to download applications for services and return via email eg– Protected trees and Job vacancies.

3.10 The website contains many links to various community groups and services, local organisations and clubs.

3.11 Although the Council is widely using the Internet as an access channel it recognises that there are those that do not have access due to disability, opportunity or because they are not familiar with using technology. We are embracing these problems through the new website project and through encouraging the use of our information points.

How we can improve:

- Ensuring that the new website is DDA compliant and that it complies with all of the web accessibility standards.
- Procure Customer Relationship Management system.
- Consistent use and advertising of online surveys across the Council
- Enhance internal email capability and capacity to maximise efficiency for both internal and external customers.

4 How is the Council using Customer' Feedback and Complaints to Improve Service Quality?

4.1 Services that actively monitor the quality of experience of people who access them include Leisure centres, Environmental Health, Housing, Planning and Elections, Community Safety . The range of methods includes customer feedback forms, suggestion boxes, audits, questionnaires and interviews. The feedback collected is discussed at team meetings to identify potential areas for improvement.

4.2 Reception logs are kept and our telephony system can be interrogated to identify the range and proportion of different service queries that come in and the departments they relate to. This data is

⁴ 'How can we serve you better?' (HDC, Jan 2002)

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available but not routinely monitored to anticipate the nature and volume of enquiries or forward plan access to services. Management reporting and capacity planning will be greatly enhanced by the introduction of a comprehensive Customer Relationship Management system.

- 4.3 The Council has a clear complaints procedure which sets out time-scales and protocol and this is reviewed annually. The procedure is currently being enhanced to include a corporate reporting process through management team and Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.4 Each service has a complaints contact and details of our complaints procedure are available at reception, on our web site and direct from Council officers. We also publicise our complaints procedure through Hart News, the next edition being January 2005.
- 4.5 The Council's target to reach Equality & Diversity Level 1 is March 2005 and to reach Level 3 by March 2007. Progress is currently being made in producing our Race Equality Scheme and preparing the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. The requirement for both these documents has drawn attention to the need for Hart to target and include groups or communities of interest that may be harder to reach than the general population. The resource that has been directed toward these two areas of activity will help to improve the level of inclusivity in planning the provision of local services.
- 4.6 A range of methods and opportunities are available and used to consult and obtain feedback from users. These include questionnaires, customer comments, on-line surveys, forums, working parties as well as through direct contact. The Council supplies freepost envelopes for the return of paper based surveys where possible. The statutory user satisfaction surveys have also proved beneficial in informing the Council about customer perceptions.
- 4.7 Hart News provides a valuable channel for the Council to inform its residents about access to services and facilities and is used to promote consultation exercises in conjunction with online surveys. A survey on customer access is being promoted through the January 2005 issue to assist us in identifying the most suitable channels for informing, consulting and feeding back to our residents.

How we can improve:

- Mechanisms - greater use of feedback and complaints to systematically improve accessibility and quality of the service. Introduce corporate monitoring and analysis to ensure consistency in the way the complaints procedure is being implemented.
- Consistency – introduce a corporate approach to consultation to co-ordinate and enhance activities between services and their service users, facilitate shared learning, avoid duplication and consultation overload and make efficiency savings.
- Effectiveness – link information and promotion of surveys with alternative access mechanisms to encourage high response rates.
- Monitoring – Greater use of routine monitoring of complaints across the Council to build up a profile of the level and nature of complaints and the services they relate to and proactively use the information to eliminate 'hotspots' within services. Also an electronic monitoring and tracking system through CRM.
- Councillor Involvement – involve members by regularly reporting monitoring summaries and analysis of complaints.
- Use best practice lessons from sections with proven track record of good customer service i.e. Housing Services Chartermark: acting on feedback to improve the service and informing partners and customers via annual reporting. Community and Customer Services – as detailed in CPA review – under Community Safety.

5 How is the Council Improving Customer Access through Partnership Working?

- 5.1 The Council's Corporate Plan (Jan 2004) states: "The Council is ... committed to working in partnership with other providers in all sectors (public, private, voluntary and not for profit) to maximise the provision of services and facilities for the benefit of the people of Hart."
- 5.2 The Council is working across traditional service boundaries to deliver a more accessible and customer-focussed services. Activity includes:
- Support for Citizens Advice Bureau, Hart Voluntary Action and other voluntary organisations particularly in terms of hard to reach groups eg travellers, and those on lower incomes.
 - Learning from and working with other authorities such as Basingstoke & Deane and Swale BC in relation to customer service centres also undertaking analysis of best practice from the private sector.
 - Work on community safety and engaging youth through CDRP⁵, SNAP⁶, and ⁷SCAM and dedicated partnership staff.

⁵ Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership

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- Helping young people to get involved in democratic process through pump-priming the set up of an Internet Café with Hook Youth Council
- Work on community safety and engaging the general public through the Hearsay Gardens Working Party, Pubwatch, Fleetlink and Wardens.
- Contributing to production of Older Persons Access Leaflet (OPAL) with Rushmoor Voluntary Services, PCT, HCC Social Services
- Working with the PCT on health issues and strategy for the District - ie access to exercise and good health and GP Referrals
- Sentinel Housing Association and Housing Services work together to enhance access to affordable, safe housing for those unable to enter the private housing market.
- Revenues & Benefits Service is currently working with external management consultancy to improve this key service to those who are on benefit.
- Work with the Pensions Service to promote the take up of Pension Credits in the area
- Working with the County Council and others in the provision of kiosks and one stop shops in less accessible locations within the district (including the constructing a catalogue of services).
- Undertaking negotiations with GOSe and Optimum Risk Management to establish a Centre of Excellence for CCTV, Security and Partner training – CSP/ LSP.
- Working with the voluntary sector to produce a representative community plan and to sign up to the Hampshire Compact with caveats for Hart.
- Working to establish a performance management and aims oriented voluntary sector and community groups partnership framework
- Environmental Health runs customer service training courses for outside organisations as well as rolling it out internally
- Public Spaces working with Project Integra, Rushmoor and Basingstoke to provide access to glass recycling and green waste services. (consultation on the glass recycling pilot has show high levels of customer satisfaction)
- Community use of leisure centres provides schools with access.
- Housing forum is being set up to enable landlords and tenants to have greater access and involvement.
- Elections work with Hart Access to improve access to polling stations
- Work with and support Parish Councils in preparing Parish plans, enabling greater access and involvement in the planning process.

- 5.3 There is evidence of a greater desire to work in partnership with other organisations who are providers within Hart (such as renewed commitment to the LSP, our significant contribution to the CSP and our involvement within the Hampshire LPSA2). Similarly, there is evidence of a greater desire to work with others who may not currently operate within the District but with whom there may be opportunity to join forces to secure benefits for the local community whether that is through enhanced service performance, quality or reduced cost of provision (or all three). Examples include exploration of joint procurement of customer relationship management software with Basingstoke and Deane BC, exploration of joint provision of refuse collection with Rushmoor BC and Basingstoke and Deane BC.

How we can improve:

- Joint working and information sharing between services and with our partners.
- Monitor and review use and effectiveness of Kiosks and One-Stop Shops to ascertain need for further locations
- Partnership Centre of Excellence (see 5.2)

6 Ownership of Problems and Willingness to Change?

Hart's commitment to continuous improvement

- 6.1 The introduction to this self assessment sets out key elements of the radical change the Council is currently under-going, namely recognition of the need and commitment to continuously improve. A number of significant factors have contributed to this in the past 18 months including:
- Change in overall political control in May 2002
 - A new Corporate Plan in January 2004
 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment, judgement and improvement planning
 - Radical organisational re-structure effected June 2004
 - Appointment of 3 new Corporate Directors
 - Preparation for the BFI Inspection
 - Budgetary constraints both locally and nationally
- 6.2 These factors have effected or consolidated:
- Greater clarity of the Council's vision, core values and ambitions
 - A drive to be more efficient and effective in what we do with our limited resources
 - Greater emphasis on performance management
 - Growing awareness of the need to focus on outcomes for the community
 - Growing awareness of the need for greater engagement with the community

⁶ Say No and Phone

⁷ Sports, Cyber, Arts & Music

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- A strength of commitment to continuous improvement generally and customer focus in particular, at staff, management and member levels

Hart is more open to challenge both internally and externally

- 6.3 Over the past year Hart's relationship with its partners and regulators has dramatically improved. This is directly related to Hart's commitment for continuous improvement.
- 6.4 There is evidence that Hart is more receptive to external challenge for instance through acceptance of the advice and recommendations of regulators and assessors including external audit (e.g. work done to ensure the robustness of performance indicators has removed the previous BVPP qualification), the Audit Commission (e.g. closer working relationships established at both senior officer and member levels), the BFI (e.g. evidence that Hart is no longer defensive about the situation but is committed to tackling the BFI findings headlong) and IIP (e.g. action plan drawn up quickly following re-accreditation and invitation to the assessor to come back to present his findings to staff).
- 6.5 In addition, there is recognition that members of the public can provide valuable external challenge and are proactively invited to do so at Scrutiny Committee and by asking questions at Full Council. Key examples of this are involvement within the Scrutiny review of Youth Facilities (2003/04) and contribution to the debate surrounding green waste collections (September 2004). There have been presentations to full Council by a range of local organisations and groups, such as HVA, CDRP. There is also evidence that difficult decisions have been made as a result of listening to the public such as the non-closure of public toilets during 2003/4 (the difficult decision being closure of a service which is seen as critical by certain sectors of the public versus the high cost of that provision in relation to the number of users).
- 6.6 Working in this more open and collaborative way provides both learning opportunities and challenge to the way that Hart does things.

How we can improve:

- Ensure that the energy and momentum for continuous improvement achieved through the restructuring is maintained and focussed on priorities
- Continue to embrace and learn from external challenge
- Invest in collaborative working arrangements with partners

7 Proven Capacity?

7.1 Perhaps the most clear and consistent priority of the Council is that of keeping Council Tax low and this, of course, impacts on other ambitions and priorities which the Council has. There is a risk (and a perception) that, without a ranking of other priorities, low Council Tax will always take precedence to the detriment of service performance and customer focus.

7.2 In view of the limitation to raise resources coming into the Council through Council Tax (not just a local priority but also imposed nationally through capping limits) Hart is seeking to maximise its resources through other means including finding and making efficiency savings, bidding to grant aid and exploring partnership working arrangements with other Councils.

The Council is committed to continuous improvement

7.3 'We've always done it like that' is no longer acceptable as a reason for continuing to do so. Continuous improvement is expected of everyone who works for Hart. This is an integral part of our performance management framework, full details are in Section 8 of this assessment.

The Council is committed to focussing on the customer

7.4 Hart benefits from a staff-force which is hugely committed to doing a good job for the community they serve with limited resources. However, the user satisfaction survey results of 2003/04 evidenced that this was not reflected in the overall perception of service from a customer point of view. Wide dissemination of the survey results to members and management highlighted the need to 'get it right for the customer'. These messages have added weight and commitment to 'Project C' outlined previously.

The Council is committed to focussing on service improvement

7.5 Similarly, the message being given to the Council through the user satisfaction surveys of 2003/4 in particular, highlighted the fact that customer satisfaction is inextricably linked to the performance of key services. These have been identified corporately as refuse collection, planning services, housing and the benefits service: service priorities which are based on user satisfaction levels, their impact on the general and specific sections of the community, and contextual character of the District. Significant efforts and resources are being channelled within each of these services in order to effect improved service delivery. The work currently being undertaken to introduce a culture of performance management throughout the Council will reinforce this commitment to improving services.

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Concentrating on what matters most to local people

7.6 The Hart Plan sets out the mechanisms that Hart uses to identify what matters most to local people. These are summarised as:

- Working with and consulting our partners
- Community feedback through MORI surveys
- User satisfaction surveys
- Encouraging public attendance and questions at Council and Scrutiny
- Targeted customer consultation
- Member representation of their constituents
- Knowledge of the district and its population

7.7 There is increasing recognition that greater effort is required in proactively seeking the view of the community. See previous sections for further details on consultation and access channels.

Concentrating efforts in proportion to priorities and maintaining focus

7.8 As outlined earlier, the introduction of Corporate Directors within the new structure has enhanced management capacity. Corporate Directors are concentrating considerable effort towards improving performance in the priority service areas of refuse collection, revenues and benefits, housing and planning. Effort is also concentrated to cross-cutting service priorities including 'Project C' and progression of the related eGovernment agenda.

7.9 Leadership Team (consisting of Chief Executive and Corporate Directors) meets weekly to ensure that focus is maintained and progress made against priority services. Joint Cabinet/Management Team also meets regularly.

7.10 Close contact is also specifically maintained with each of the Cabinet Members responsible for these services to ensure their awareness, and to gain support and commitment (political and financial) to improvement in these areas. The role of Scrutiny Committee is also important in this context.

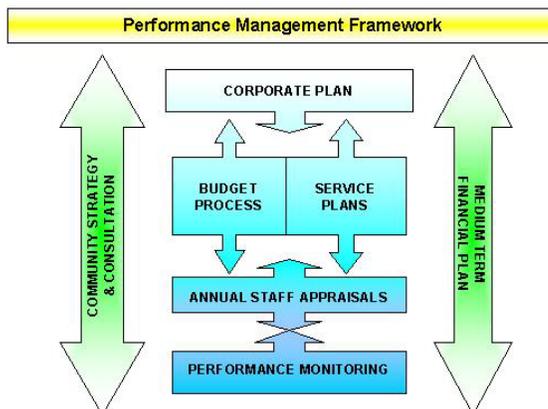
7.11 Additional investment has been introduced into the benefits service through a performance partnership agreement with consultants and the successful DWP bid for capital to replace the revenues and benefits IT system and its implementation. Planning Delivery Grant has been successfully utilised to meet the planning standards target for all categories of planning application. Additional resources have been channelled to the purchase of two new refuse vehicles and the reconfiguration of refuse routes to assist in reducing the level of missed bins. There has also been substantial investment in e-Government - refer to Section 3.

How we can improve:

- Give greater clarity to corporate priorities and identify specific outcomes sought.
- Further develop the culture of performance management throughout the Council

8 What Capacity and Systems Exist to Deliver Performance and Improvement?

The performance management framework



8.1 Corporate Plan

8.2 The Council's Corporate Plan directs the Council's customer focus. This focus has been established through the methods outline in Section 1.

Budget Process

8.3 The Medium Term Financial Strategy 2004, sets out the assumptions and direction for preparing the 2005/06 budget. This will be influenced by inter alia, service priorities in accordance with the corporate plan, performance management and quality of service delivery and improvement planning.

Service Plans

8.4 The Council has advanced service planning by aligning it with the budget planning process, and issuing new corporate guidance for the 2005/6 cycle. The guidance emphasises the need to consider customer need at each stage of service delivery. Further details on service planning can be found in Section 9.

Annual staff appraisals

8.5 There is renewed emphasis on performance appraisals, and their consistent application throughout the Council. The process features strong links back to the corporate vision including customer focus. This process starts with a culture of customer care being introduced at induction stage for all new starters.

Performance Monitoring

8.6 The mechanisms for monitoring PIs include:

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- The reporting of performance to staff (via display posters), service managers, leadership team and Councillors/portfolio holders on key indicators on a monthly basis.
- Formal reporting, on a more comprehensive range of indicators, happens quarterly to inform management, Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.
- All of the PIs, whether statutory or local, are reported annually through the Council's performance plan to Cabinet, Council and to the public.

Lines of accountability for action

- 8.7 Corporate Directors do not have direct line management responsibilities, they are each affiliated to a number of service areas and accordingly have the ability to add capacity where it is required. Direct line management responsibilities are held by Heads of Service.

How we can improve:

- Maintain training and involvement of all staff in service planning so that they are fully aware of the performance measures in place for their own service
- Develop corporate health indicators and develop smart targets against them to assist in maintaining focus and guide performance
- Introduce strategic performance mapping and monitoring, such as a balanced scorecard.
- Ensure performance is effectively monitored, managed and reviewed to ensure actual performance is in line with expectation – via setting up a performance board and Procure a corporate performance management system.

9 How are the Principles of Best Value Integrated into Day-to-day Processes?

- 9.1 Recent sustained improvements in access to services include:
- Leisure centre's new IT system to facilitate online booking facilities; improvements to crèche service at the leisure centres
 - Changes in leisure programmes to hit market needs (ie. Cinema in Harlington Centre and creche at Hart Leisure Centre)
 - DDA work (eg. Access to nature reserves, such as Fleet Pond)
 - New benefits counter and private interview room
 - Planning On-line
 - On-line surveys
 - Mini-sites for Licensing, Elections, Democratic Services, etc
 - 2 new waste services – glass and garden waste collection
 - The appointment of a dedicated Anti Social Behaviour Officer for the District.

- 9.2 Best Value is integral to the Council's performance management processes detailed in Section 8. Best value is built into the whole service planning and improvement process.
- 9.3 New service planning guidance was issued in October 2004, with the intention of making it more staff and customer inclusive. This will improve the consistency of the plans across all services and enable us to show more clearly our achievements.
- 9.4 The new guidance embraces and promotes the principles of best value through the '4Cs'. It ensures the process of service planning is an ongoing and integral part of the running of all services and the Council as a whole through the requirement for a clear 'line of sight' between service and corporate objectives.

How we can improve:

- Continue to main stream Best Value principles through service planning and reviews.

10.0 Conclusion

- 10.1 The Council has made a start on a far reaching culture change process for customer focus. This will take time to become established, main streamed and embedded. However, the Council is on track to continue its work on Project C to better service its customers and is committed to doing so into the future.