

RIBBLE VALLEY
BOROUGH COUNCIL



COMPREHENSIVE
PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT
SELF ASSESSMENT
DECEMBER 2007



MISSION STATEMENT AND VISION

The Council has adopted the following statement that sets out its role and responsibilities in relation to the communities it exists to serve:

“The Council will provide high quality, affordable and responsive public services that develop the social and economic well-being of the Borough, whilst safeguarding the rural nature of the area.”

Our VISION, which is shared with the Local Strategic Partnership, remains constant. By no later than 2016 we aim to ensure that Ribble Valley will be:

“An area with an exceptional environment and quality of life for all; sustained by vital and vibrant market towns and villages acting as thriving service centres, meeting the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.”

A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

In order to deliver its Vision and provide a focus for how it delivers services, the Council has agreed a set of overriding ambitions. Above all, *we aim to be a well-managed Council* providing efficient services based on identified customer needs, whilst recognising the importance of securing a diverse, sustainable economic base for the Borough. The three Ambitions, which the Council has agreed it will work towards, are:

- To help make people’s lives SAFER AND HEALTHIER
- To PROTECT AND ENHANCE the existing ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY of our area
- To MATCH the SUPPLY OF HOMES in our area with the IDENTIFIED HOUSING NEEDS

CORE VALUES

In pursuing our priority actions, the Council will continue to deliver the services people want, in a fair and consistent manner. These values guide and influence our actions as we continuously improve the services we deliver. We will:

- Lead the Community
- Strive to achieve excellence
- Ensure that access to services is available to all
- Treat everyone equally
- Respect all individuals and their views, and
- Appreciate and invest in our staff.



REFERENCES

- 1 ONS 2006 mid-year projection
- 2 Valuation Office June 2007
- 3 The 2001 census breaks this down as follows Mixed (0.4%), Asian or Asian British (0.8%), Indian (0.2%), Pakistani (0.4), Other Asian (0.1%), Black or Black British (0.1%), African (0.1%), Chinese or Other Ethnic Group (0.3%).
- 4 Index of Multiple Deprivation
- 5 Office of National Statistics – Labour force survey
- 6 Land Registry data
- 7 As at November 2007
- 8 2005 Community Strategy
- 9 Mission statement of the East Lancashire PCT
- 10 Employee Survey Report March 2007
- 11 53%
- 12 Press releases (For example: Dec 7 2005, April 5 2006, June 27 2006, July 27 2006, Aug 11 2006, Aug 16 2006 and Sept 21 2006 - all communicate decisions about ambitions)
- 13 Our bi-annual civic publication
- 14 Newsletter distributed to private sector landlords
- 15 Produced Autumn 2007 – summary of Performance Plan and Statement of Accounts
- 16 Audit Commission CPA Report 2004
- 17 Last reviewed in May 2007
- 18 Formed to oversee Housing Market Renewal in East Lancashire
- 19 Audit Commission 2004 CPA Report
- 20 Yvonne McDermott BSc MRICS - Development Manager - Vincentian Homes and Services (VHS) Ltd
- 21 2005-2006 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter
- 22 Audit Commission Performance Information Profile Tool – October 2007
- 23 The Modern Councillor – Learning Pool
- 24 The excellent Benefits Best Value Survey 2006 results
- 25 Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Rossendale
- 26 See article in Lancashire Telegraph 9 April 2007
- 27 2005-2006 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter
- 28 CIPFA General Statistics 2006/07 - Total Budget Requirement
- 29 Audit Commission VFM Profile – April 2007
- 30 2005-2006 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter
- 31 Report to O&S Resources Committee December 2006
- 32 Environmental Health, Housing, Revenues and Benefits and Development and Building Control reports to committee
- 33 The last Northern User Group meeting was held at Ribble Valley BC - July 2007
- 34 Held in Dudley October 2007
- 35 Pendle BC, Craven DC, Chorley BC and West Lancashire DC
- 36 Employee Satisfaction Survey Report March 2007
- 37 PWC 2006/07 Report to those charged with governance (ISA260 report)
- 38 Joint Annual Audit and Inspection letter – April 2007
- 39 Produced for the first time in 2007 in conjunction with other Lancashire districts, Lancashire County Council, Lancashire Police Authority and Lancashire Fire and Rescue
- 40 Linda Waddington (analyst) monitoring reports
- 41 Property owner following grant assistance - September 2006
- 42 Joint Annual Audit and Inspection Letter – April 2007
- 43 Letter from GONW Deputy Regional Director - November 2006
- 44 Joint Annual Audit and Inspection Letter – April 2007
- 45 An education and creative arts project at the heart of the East Lancashire Regional Park initiative led by the Lancashire Economic Partnership (LEP). Funded by LEP, Arts Council England North West and Lancashire County Council
- 46 Teacher Year 10 - a Ribble Valley High School - April 2007

INTRODUCTION

In July 2007 the Audit Commission approved the Council's application for re-categorisation under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework. We are pleased to introduce our Corporate Self-Assessment in which we present the evidence for re-categorisation.

Ribble Valley has always had a good reputation for delivering good value for money - delivering high performing services within consistently low levels of Council Tax. This is borne out by the latest available data that confirms that 40% of our national PIs are in the Top Quartile, far exceeding the district council average whilst our overall expenditure remains one of the lowest in England. That we can successfully deliver such high performing services across the most sparsely populated district in Lancashire, whilst maintaining the lowest Council Tax in Lancashire, I believe is incontrovertible evidence that the Council is most efficient in the way it spends public money.

Our commitment to service excellence is borne by our customers who recently judged us 'Best in the North West' – achieving a double first in the national Best Value General Household Satisfaction survey; scoring the highest level of customer satisfaction with council services and for cleanliness within the entire North West region. The same survey also identified Ribble Valley in the Top Quartile and the sixth best nationally for overall improvement over the last three years.

Since our last assessment we have continued to improve the Council in a number of ways addressing former weaknesses by increasing our corporate capacity, becoming much more outwardly focused and embracing partnership working across a number of areas.

We do not let our relatively small size inhibit our ability to take on the challenge and successfully deliver major projects. As this Self-Assessment shows the Council is currently engaged in delivering some major projects that puts us at the cutting edge of local service provision within the North West. These include implementing an innovative, three-stream waste collection scheme across the Borough, the £3.2m Clitheroe Castle Restoration Project – the largest project of its kind in the North West, and the introduction of a shared customer relationship management system.

We firmly believe the evidence provided in this Self-Assessment makes a very strong case for re-categorisation and we look forward to working with the Inspection Team during their forthcoming visit and assisting them wherever necessary to reach a satisfactory conclusion.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Ranson".

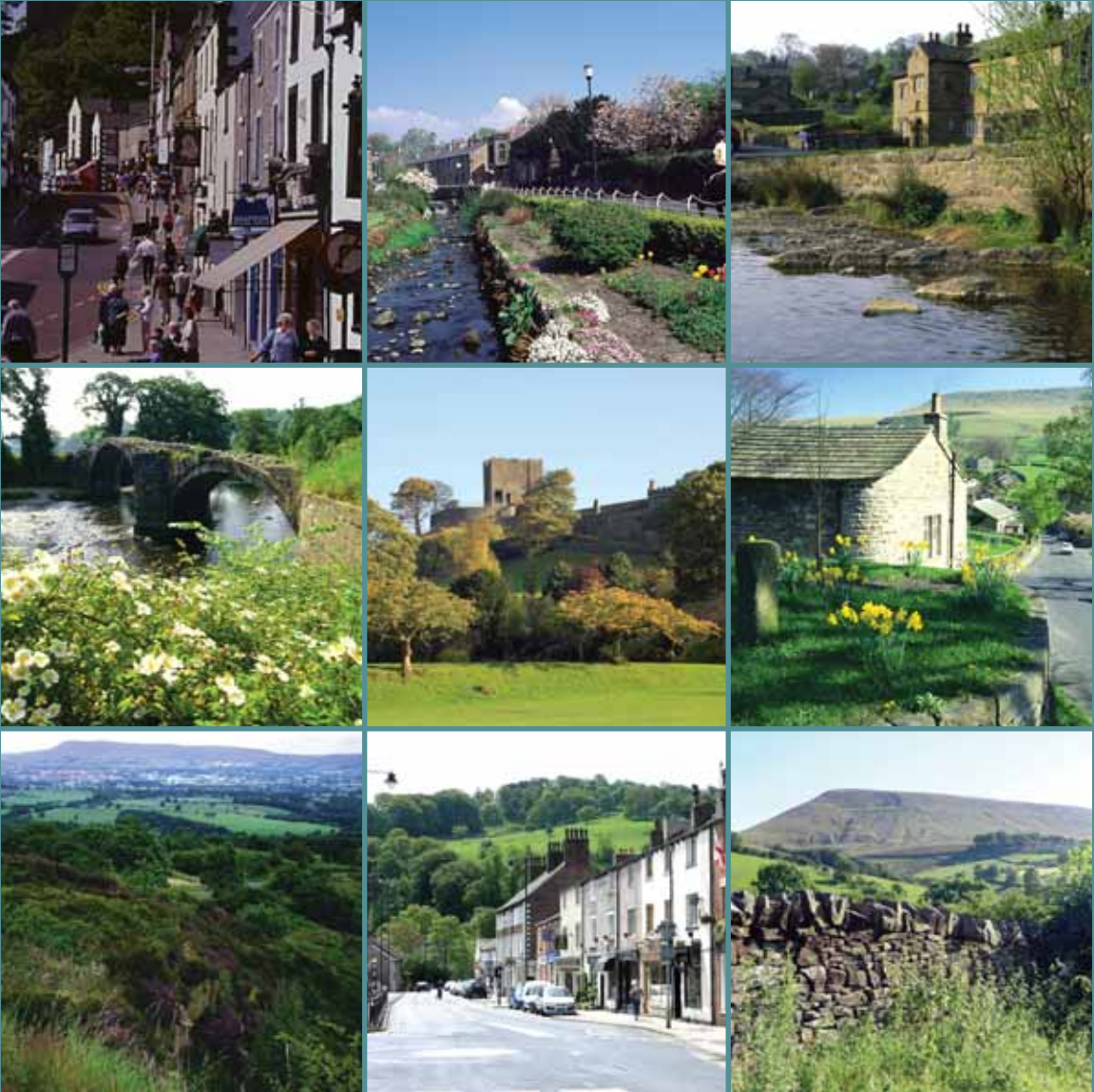
Councillor
Michael Ranson
Leader



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Morris".

David Morris
Chief Executive

CONTEXT AND SUMMARY



The Locality

Ribble Valley is in the county of Lancashire bordering neighbouring councils in East Lancashire, Craven District Council in North Yorkshire, South Ribble, Preston, Wyre and Lancaster Borough Councils. The administrative centre for the district is the historic market town of Clitheroe. The industrial and commercial centre for the west of the borough is the town of Longridge. The remaining area is mainly rural, ranging from large villages to small hamlets. Some settlements are accessible along the A59 corridor; others are more remote from services and public transport. Along with ancient woodland, biological heritage sites, conservation areas and sites of special scientific interest, two thirds of Ribble Valley is designated as part of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Population and Demographics

According to the 2001 census, the population of the district is 53,960 (although it is now estimated at 57,800¹), living in 24,482 households,² of which approximately 25% are in the town of Clitheroe. Ribble Valley has the largest geographical area within Lancashire, covering 226 square miles (583 square kilometres), but the smallest population. Sparsity of population is, therefore, a key feature – on average 94 people per square kilometre, compared with 380 nationally. There has been an increase of 5.2% in the overall population of the district since 1991, and it is predicted to rise by 10.4% over the next 10 years. A relatively small proportion of the population, less than 2%, is from ethnic minority backgrounds.³ The resident population is relatively old, with a greater than average number of residents over the age of 65 (over 20% compared with a national average of 18%) and consequently a below average number of young people aged 24 and under. Population projections suggest that this imbalance will increase in future.

Deprivation and the Local Economy

Ribble Valley is a relatively affluent area and is ranked 283 out of 354 in the indices of deprivation for local authority areas in England (with one being the most disadvantaged). No wards figure in the 25% most deprived, but 5 wards do figure within the worst 10% of all English wards under the Access to Services Index.⁴

Unemployment is well below the national and regional averages and the lowest in the North West (at 2.4% compared with the national average of 5.3%)⁵. Earnings are above the national average. However, this masks the structural threat to the area's employment opportunities: the type of jobs available (low skill jobs in declining sectors) and their relatively low pay. Given the rural nature of the area, it is not surprising that agriculture and tourism are important employers. However, recent years have seen major restructuring, within the agricultural/land-based sector in particular. The tourism sector accounts for over 10% of employment, and it is

estimated that the total spent by tourists in Ribble Valley each year is in excess of £19.5 million. Additionally there are estimated to be around 2,500 jobs in tourism-related businesses. One of the largest employment sectors in Ribble Valley is manufacturing, which accounts for 23.4% of employment within the borough, and is represented by major national and multi-national companies such as Castle Cement, Johnson Matthey, and BAe Systems. The relatively small number of large employers is complemented by an above average presence of small companies employing 1-4 employees. A survey undertaken in 2001 showed that Ribble Valley has the second most skilled population in the country after the City of London. However, the survey masks the fact that many of these well-qualified people in high-earning, senior positions commute daily out of the borough, and live in the area because of the high quality environment and the quality of life it offers. This has had the effect of forcing up the price of houses within the borough, putting them well out of the reach of young people/first time buyers.

The mean house price in Ribble Valley for the second quarter of 2007 is £227,480, with a lower quartile house price of £129,950 in 2006.⁶

In terms of housing tenure, 81.2% of dwellings are owner occupied, 11.2% are privately rented and 7.6% are public sector rented. There are currently approximately 365 long-term vacant private dwellings, a figure that we are taking action to reduce. The Council currently owns its own housing stock, comprising 1,172⁷ properties, although this has been significantly depleted over recent years, with high numbers of 'right to buys'. The Council is in the process of transferring its housing stock to a Registered Social Landlord. It is expected that the transfer will be completed by April 2008.

Financial Context

For 2007/08 the Council set a General Fund budget of £7.2m. This included modest growth of £154,000, the main item being £117,000 extra for the costs of the introduction of waste management initiatives, including the introduction of a three-stream waste programme across the borough. The net-spend per head of population for 2007/08 is £130.91. The Band D Council Tax for 2007/08 was set at £128.65 (an overall increase of 2% on the previous year, still one of the lowest in Lancashire.)

A five-year Capital Programme for 2007-2012 was approved, totalling £9.2m. Expenditure is planned for 2007/08 amounting to £2.5m, which includes:

- £1.2m on affordable housing
- £0.3m on environmental improvements
- £0.6m on recycling and
- £0.2m on leisure schemes.

Political Structure, Management and Human Resources

Ribble Valley Borough Council has 40 councillors. There are 29 conservatives, 10 liberal democrats and 1 independent.

The Council is a '4th option' local authority and operates a committee system. There are 6 service committees, 2 Overview and Scrutiny committees, an Accounts and Audit committee and a Standards committee. There is also a Parish Council Liaison committee. The Standards committee meets 3 times per year, the Accounts and Audit committee meets 4 times per year and other committees and the Council meet 6 times per year. There is also a cross-party budget-working group, which advises the Council on budget preparation.

The Council employs 270 staff, and services are delivered by 4 departments:

- Chief Executive, responsible for corporate services, human resources, member services and health and safety;
- Development, responsible for environmental health, forward planning (including regeneration and countryside) and development and building control;
- Community Services, responsible for street scene services (including engineering, parking, CCTV, grounds maintenance, waste management and street cleansing), community development (including crime and disorder, culture, recreation and tourism) and housing; and
- Resources, which includes legal, ICT, finance, revenues and benefits.

The Chief Executive and the three departmental directors form the Corporate Management Team, which meets weekly.

Partnership Working

We work with a wide-range of partners in order to achieve our priorities:

It is important that we continue to punch above our weight and we are very proactive in this respect, working in partnership to lead on a wide range of issues on behalf of others in the region and sub-region. Our partnerships are also challenging from a geographical perspective as a result of the size and complexity of the county and the lack of boundary co-terminosity among major partners such as the police and PCT's.

Nonetheless we have developed innovative partnerships more locally with Lancashire County Council (LCC), with neighbouring authorities and with other agencies on a broad range of issues to progress community leadership, service delivery and crosscutting matters.

- As an active member of the Lancashire Waste Partnership (LWP) since its formation, the Council has helped to lead the environmental revolution that has seen recycling performance increase dramatically across the county.
- We are one of seven partners in the County Council-led Lancashire Shared Services Contact Centre (SSCC) project, that has procured a shared Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that will transform the quality of customer service across the County over the next 12 months.
- We are a founder member of the East Lancashire e-Partnership (ELeP), which is recognised nationally for its work on both procurement and electronic forms of consultation.
- We have played an active role in shaping the Lancashire Local Area Agreement and developing the way forward on enhanced two-tier working in Lancashire.
- We play a key role in Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership and its themed groups.
- The Council is involved in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership on a range of activities to reduce crime and disorder, the fear of crime and to encourage community engagement to achieve this reduction.

The emerging Pennine Lancashire Multi-Area Agreement (MAA) includes Ribble Valley, the neighbouring five East Lancashire councils and the Lancashire County Council. The MAA will provide a framework for ongoing strategic collaboration between the 6 local authorities in key areas where a sub-regional approach makes sense. This is 1 of only 13 partnerships throughout the country which has recently been supported by DCLG.

We are partners in a successful Ribble Valley Lancashire Local initiative with the County Council.

We also recognise that, as a small district council, our capacity is limited and others are sometimes better placed than ourselves to meet the needs of our local communities. We therefore work with a wide range of organisations to build capacity and deliver services including the voluntary and community sector and local communities themselves. We have also developed private sector partnerships where our own resources are limited such as job evaluation and asset management.

CORPORATE ASSESSMENT



What is the Council, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

1. AMBITION FOR RIBBLE VALLEY

Ribble Valley is an ambitious authority, as can be seen by our recent achievements and the stretching targets in the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and our Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan (CP&IP).

The Council was the prime mover in establishing the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership and in guiding it through its early stages. The present Partnership, which evolved from a Regeneration Partnership, is chaired by a prominent local businessman with considerable involvement in the community. He sits on the board of many key partnerships including the Lancashire Economic Partnership and is a champion of rural issues for Lancashire. The partnership brings together representatives from the business, voluntary, community and public sectors. The working arrangements of the Partnership have been reviewed in the past year and additional support for the partnership has been provided with the aim of helping to achieve outcomes for the wider community. The Strategic Partnership has the following themed groups representing the priorities of the SCS:

- Economy
- Community Inclusion (Cohesion)
- Strategic Health Improvement
- Crime and Disorder Reduction
- Cultural Alliance (Sports and Physical Activity Alliance, Play Alliance, Arts Alliance)
- Environment
- Housing Forum
- Children and Young Persons (Children's Trust)
- Older Persons' Forum
- Transport

Each of these groups has identified and consulted on a series of objectives and priority actions which have then been fed into the SCS.

The Council has been heavily involved in the production of the new SCS, through its role as members of the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership and support for the post of LSP Manager.

The SCS is aligned to the countywide 'Ambition Lancashire' community strategy, and is linked to the current Lancashire Local Area Agreement (LAA).

Together with Lancashire County Council, under the Rural Pathfinder Scheme, we have commissioned a consultant to develop a joint pilot project entitled 'Connecting Service Delivery with Communities.' This project involves providing an overview on both the preparation and content of the SCS.

Our Vision

The SCS sets out a clear vision for our area, which is based on the aims and objectives of the people and organisations we have talked and listened to.

By no later than 2016, we aim to ensure that Ribble Valley will be:

*"An area with an exceptional environment and quality of life for all; sustained by vital and vibrant market towns and villages, acting as thriving service centres, meeting the needs of residents, businesses and visitors."*⁸

Certainly the vision is ambitious, but equally it is achievable. By 2016, we believe that many of the challenges facing us can be tackled – in some cases overcome completely – by organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors, working with local communities, agreeing common goals and developing realistic, practical ways of achieving them, such as our success in reducing levels of crime and disorder.

The 'Golden Thread'

Our vision is the start of a "golden thread" which runs through a comprehensive planning framework, which has been thoroughly revised over the past three years. It is supported by Council strategies and policies, refreshed to ensure they are all "fit for purpose" and able to support our ambitions for the Borough.

The Council's CP&IP was developed from a draft SCS (which will become an approved document in December 2007), and combines our Corporate Plan with our Performance Plan to form one new strategic document. This document was published on 30 June 2007.

The draft SCS describes the focused targets and actions that partner organisations have committed to achieving, working both individually and in collaboration with each other, against agreed objectives.

Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership operates a performance management framework that the Council and its partners developed and implemented to manage and improve performance against key priorities.

Within the Council, all our planning and performance frameworks are directly aligned with the SCS objectives. The CP&IP includes an associated set of action plans – one for each of the Council's ambitions. The three ambitions are clearly derived from priority areas in the SCS and from the shared vision. The underlying ambitions for the community are:

- To make people's lives SAFER AND HEALTHIER
- To PROTECT AND ENHANCE the existing ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY of our area
- To MATCH the SUPPLY OF HOMES in our area with the IDENTIFIED HOUSING NEEDS

The **first ambition** supports the mission statement of the East Lancashire PCT:

*"to improve the health of the local people and ensure the provision of high quality care."*⁹

It acknowledges that we have a new duty to enforce smoke-free legislation and that by increasing opportunities for people to access cultural and leisure facilities we can help reduce health inequalities in the borough. We also have a role in emergency planning.

The ambition recognises the results of a Crime and Disorder Audit, and the development of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy in 2005, which highlighted the fear of crime, vandalism, juvenile nuisance and drug-related crime in our area.

The **second ambition** recognises that our greatest asset is the natural beauty of Ribble Valley. This ambition reflects the wishes of the community and concerns of residents about issues such as litter, weed control, dog fouling, climate change, waste re-cycling, the built environment and energy efficiency.

The **third ambition** recognises that one of the major problems facing the borough is the lack of affordable homes, especially for young first-time buyers. We will continue to work in partnership with Registered Social Landlords, private builders and landlords to provide more affordable homes. We will try to meet the housing needs of our citizens and improve and maintain the condition of the private sector housing stock. We are in the process of examining our planning policies for the delivery of affordable homes.

The Council strongly believes that its ambitions are not only desirable and a reflection of the community's aspirations, but are areas in which the Council can make a real difference, both through its own actions and through working in partnership with others.

The SCS and the CP&IP outline clear actions and outcome-based targets. The CP&IP links the planned actions with the Council's ambitions, setting out how we will achieve the vision and ambitions with priority outcomes, long-term targets, and actions, which are SMART and monitored in accordance with our performance management framework. Through regular monitoring, the Council knows what it has achieved and what remains to be achieved.

The Council's CP&IP illustrates how realistic and robust these ambitions are by showing how much progress is being made, using baselines, targets and clear milestones.

Communicating Our Ambitions

We ensure that our ambitions are understood and shared by all Councillors, and officers.

The ambitions and core values are discussed at meetings of the Corporate Management Team and the two political groups. All staff have been handed their own copy of the ambitions, and the message has been reinforced at the regular staff meetings, in 'Backchat' (the monthly staff newsletter) and on 'Arvey's World' (our Intranet). But, more importantly, managers have used the staff performance appraisal scheme not only to test out the understanding of staff as far as the Council's ambitions are concerned but also to ensure that the targets set for every member of staff contribute in some way to the achievement of one or more of the Council's ambitions.

Our most recent Employee survey¹⁰ found that nearly 80% of respondents agreed that the Council communicates its ambitions and priorities to them. The majority of respondents¹¹ understood how they 'fit into the bigger picture'.

Following the local elections on 3 May 2007, induction training was carried out for all new councillors (and existing councillors) where our ambitions formed a key focus.

We also communicate our ambitions for Ribble Valley to the wider community, partners and stakeholders using a variety of tools and techniques which include the distribution of our CP&IP, press releases¹², our website, Ribble Valley News¹³, 'Moving On'¹⁴, Tenants Newsletters, Council Tax leaflets and our Annual Report¹⁵.

As a result we feel that local people are clear about what it is the Council and its partners are seeking to achieve and understand the balances that have been struck.

Consultation and Community Involvement

As well as getting better at communicating and making clear our priorities, we have also made significant progress in improving the ways in which we consult with, engage with and listen to our communities, including identified disadvantaged groups.

*"The council has also attempted to engage with 'hard to reach' groups, such as homeless people and young people. User consultation was used effectively as part of the homelessness review to identify gaps in provision and poorer areas of performance in service delivery"*¹⁶. **Audit Commission**

In 2002 the five district councils of East Lancashire formed the East Lancashire e-Partnership (ELeP). The partnership recognised a need to improve the ways in which citizens are consulted, and identified the value of working together as a partnership, sharing information and efforts to deliver better services to citizens.

CASE STUDY - CONSULTATION IN PARTNERSHIP

The partnership's citizens' panel, selected to represent the views of the local community, was created in 2003 and named 'Feedb@ck'. Up to five surveys are carried out each year, with at least two being conducted solely at a local level.

Partnership achievements include:

- Availability of on-line surveys (also available in printed format as well as large print and languages other than English on request.)
- Sometimes selected people on the panel may be asked to take part in smaller focus group discussions about specific issues
- Regular Newsletters providing feedback on results are sent to all panel members. Press releases inform the wider community of the views of the panel on particular local issues.
- Results are used by each council to improve services.
- Development of a joint Consultation Framework, which aims to articulate the shared vision for the delivery of a joint service and Citizens' Panel, and the key strategic aims. This document is a public statement of our approach to partnership working.
- Development of a Consultation Diary which provides details of past, present and forthcoming consultations. Further development of the Consultation diary/database is planned.
- A Consultation Toolkit is available - it is a valuable resource for all staff involved in consultation. It represents a step-by-step guide to planning engagement with the community, answering questions such as: Who to consult? What to consult on? How to consult? How to produce and use results effectively?
- Gaining the ability, through the EL&P, to use innovative ways of consulting our communities, including the use of vox pops, texting services and hand held 'Millionaire-style' voting equipment .
- 68% of the panel are happy being a Ribble Valley panel member

The Council has developed a Corporate Consultation Strategy¹⁷ to help align and co-ordinate activity. We have many examples of good practice, including an annual consultation plan and a consultation toolkit.

Both the draft SCS and the CP&IP are based on a thorough assessment of needs, demographic trends, statistical analysis, consultation/research and the identification of key issues.

Our GIS software mapping systems enable us to check and analyse information. The system has been used to provide relevant data for street-cleansing services, refuse collection rounds and planning applications. We are collaborating with other councils in the North West to share GIS data through

an extranet site, 'Mapzone', and a website, 'Mario', which are hosted by Lancashire County Council.

Much of our confidence in achieving our vision and ambitions is based on the fact that we understand our local communities and the profile of the borough, including the needs and aspirations expressed by Ribble Valley citizens, e.g.:

- 'Setting the Scene for the Centre of the Kingdom: A Picture of Ribble Valley' produced in 2003, and now regularly updated. This presents information on demographics, economy, health and well-being
- Extensive consultation with local people such as through our regular Feedb@ck surveys.

We have a good grasp of the key challenges and opportunities facing the Borough. Our self-awareness has been further strengthened through research, e.g. the 2006 joint citizens' panel, focusing on Living and Working in East Lancashire.

CASE STUDY - CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - STRATEGIC LAND USE

Residents have been invited to complete either online or paper questionnaires to have their say on future strategic land use in the borough. This consultation will help establish the Core Strategy, which is part of our Local Development Framework used to assess planning applications taking into account key factors such as employment, housing, environmental protection, historic buildings and the creation of mixed communities.

Housing needs assessments have been carried out down to parish level, and a raft of information on housing needs is now available to assist with the provision of affordable homes.

The East Lancashire Data Group has collected and analysed various statistics to inform Elevate¹⁸ on housing market renewal. The information covers the Ribble Valley and is used by the Council through the jointly developed Local Intelligence System.

*"The Council is providing strong direct and indirect community leadership to promote community cohesion, eliminate discrimination and assure fair access to services. This role is carried out largely through the operation of the LSP in which the council has demonstrated a clear leadership role. The LSP has sub groups in place such as the Community Cohesion Task Group, and the Ribble Valley Access Group."*¹⁹ **Audit Commission**

The Council has access to a range of statistics collected and used by the East Lancashire PCT, the LAA, and statistics available on, and used for, the Local Development Framework (LDF), waste collection and recycling.

Data sharing protocols are being developed across partners, and have also helped to develop the MADE (Multi-Agency Data Exchange) database which proves very useful when determining Crime and Disorder priorities and shaping action.

Ribble Valley residents and other stakeholders are invited to have their say on the services provided by the Council at our Annual Public Meeting and all of our service committees.

Effective Community Leadership and Partnership Working

Community Leadership is an area where we continue to work hard to develop this key role not only at a local level but also at sub-regional and regional levels.

- The Council provides leadership to the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership, both at board level and through its operational theme groups, ensuring that our vision will address key sub-regional, regional and local issues. We also provide significant officer support to this most important partnership.
- The East Lancashire Leaders and Chief Executives Group (ELLCHEx) is a powerful partnership which has been working for some 2 years on the Transformational Agenda for Pennine Lancashire. All political leaders of the Lancashire Local authorities, the chief executives from those authorities, ELEVATE, the Chamber of Commerce, PCT and Lancashire Economic Partnership are members of ELLCHEx. Priority projects include the development of strategic employment sites, learning and skills, housing market, health, lifestyle and image, enterprise and worklessness.
- In 2007 the East Lancashire local authority Leaders agreed to support, in principle, the establishment of a Pennine Lancashire Development Company. This arms-length delivery company will work across local authority boundaries on functions which will be primarily economically focussed.

The Council provides community leadership by appointing members to a wide range of local community groups such as Carers Link, Police and Community Forum and Trinity Community Partnership.

In July 2007 the Leader of the Council arranged and chaired a meeting of local councillors, town councillors, Chamber of Trade, Lancashire County Council, Ribble Valley Access Group and local residents in Clitheroe town centre to discuss and take action relating to car parking and traffic, street scene and litter. The meeting created multi-agency working groups to look at these important issues in 3 different areas of Clitheroe town centre, producing suggestions and a plan of action.

Sometimes community leadership means we have to take, and stick to, tough decisions. The decision taken to transfer our housing stock is an example of this decisive leadership.

CASE STUDY - HOUSING STOCK TRANSFER

In 2002 the Council was faced with the challenge of deciding the future of its housing stock. Consultation at the time told us that the tenants wanted to stay with the Council, but initial analysis suggested that the Council did not have the resources to enable it to deliver against the emerging Government agenda of Decent Homes Standard Plus.

In recognition of the preference of the tenants, the Council committed further resources to a review of the position, covering everything from the stock condition survey through funding options to meetings with officers and elected members from neighbouring authorities who had transferred or who were in the process of transferring their stock.

Although the review confirmed that transfer was the best way forward, the review helped to resolve the position of those members who were initially opposed to transfer. It also strengthened the arguments for the advantages of transfer.

We ensure that our partnership working is productive, in line with our priorities and achieves value for money.

- The Council is an active partner in the Lancashire Local Area Agreement (LAA), which addresses local priorities and delivers improved quality services by targeting resources and actions in areas identified as being in greatest need. Principal activities include:
 - The Ribble Valley and Pendle Rural Housing Enabler Scheme, which is a joint initiative between the councils of Ribble Valley and Pendle to provide affordable housing within rural areas. The work includes undertaking parish-wide housing needs surveys to investigate local needs, and working in partnership with local communities, Parish Councils and other organisations such as housing associations, local authority housing and planning departments, landowners and developers to meet those housing needs.
 - LAA pooled funding is being used to contribute towards the Council's new 3 stream waste collection service that is being introduced to help the Council meet its demanding targets to increase the proportion of domestic waste that is being recycled, whilst reducing the amount going to landfill.
 - The Council is involved in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership on a range of activities to reduce crime and disorder, the fear of crime and to encourage community engagement to achieve this reduction. The CDRP is chaired by the Chief Executive and includes senior members working in close and highly effective partnership with the Lancashire Constabulary, the Police

Authority, probation services, fire and rescue, Lancashire County Council and the local PCT.

“The housing team and the Rural Housing Enabler at Ribble Valley helped us to deliver 13 new homes in the village of Waddington, taking a leading role in ensuring that local people were consulted in the process. Without the support of the Rural Housing Enabler in Ribble Valley, and the local housing needs surveys which have now been completed, we would not be able to advance projects which directly meet the identified needs in rural areas”²⁰. Development Manager Vincentian Homes

- Ribble Valley is ‘fully parished’ with 2 town councils, 33 parish councils and 5 parish meetings. Our Parish Council Liaison Committee, which meets 6 times a year, is chaired by a parish councillor, with the Chief Executive acting as secretary. The committee enables the parishes to speak with a single voice for the diverse communities throughout our vast area. In addition, officers regularly attend meetings of the parish councils and offer advice and support.
- As members of the Lancashire Waste Partnership, our particular contribution has been to develop, pilot and now roll out a combined system of collecting recyclables and residual waste in the same vehicle in one pass. Because this makes possible the retention of weekly collections of residual waste, other districts are now adopting the system. Ribble Valley Councillor Graham Sowter was elected as the first district representative to chair the partnership.
- Ribble Valley and four neighbouring district councils formed the East Lancashire e-Partnership (ELeP) in 2002 to collaborate in the delivery of modernised, electronically delivered services to their citizens. Initially, external consultants were employed to provide expertise and develop workstreams around procurement, consultation, process transformation and web-interactions. Since that time the Partnership has successfully developed member authorities’ own capacity and embedded the expertise so that they are becoming increasingly self-sufficient and capable of providing the services in-house, whilst continuing to gain the benefits of collaborative working. The Partnership’s success has been recognised nationally by the securing of awards from the Local Government Chronicle and the Society of Procurement Officers in 2005.
- The Lancashire Shared Services Contact Centre Partnership (SSCC) was formed in 2004 when Ribble Valley joined with Burnley, Chorley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Rossendale and Lancashire County Councils, procuring a shared Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The Council began by introducing a Street Scene Helpline in February 2006 to support the introduction of the new, 3 stream waste collection service. Since June 2006 specialist Customer Service Advisors have developed the service by handling calls for an increasing range of services including Street Scene,

concessionary fares and e-payments, as well as the provision of a wide range of information services. The CRM is scheduled to ‘Go Live’ in December 2007 and will allow more complex enquiries to be handled by the Centre. In the longer term the intention is for all partners to develop the capability to be able to handle calls for each other, leading to more effective working.

- The Lancashire Local – Ribble Valley, has both county and district councillors meeting together, in public, to discuss matters of shared interest and responsibility. The ‘local’ has delegated powers to take formal decisions on the delivery of some county council services within the Ribble Valley. Senior members of the Council play an active role in this developing partnership initiative.
- For many years the Ribble Valley has been the location for a range of outdoor events including agricultural shows, cycling road races, street fairs, car boot sales, musical festivals, and community events. The Council has recently produced a Safer Events Policy and Strategy, which provides a consistent approach to promoting safe, considerate and successful events in our area. At its core is the co-operation between the lead agencies including police, fire and rescue, ambulance and highway agencies as partner members of the Events Safety Advisory Group, which is chaired by our Emergency Planning Officer. This cooperation has led to many success stories and significant improvements to the way in which outdoor events are planned and managed.
- Tourism is a vital industry for many of the rural communities in the Ribble Valley. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Michael Ranson, is a director of the Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board.

Most importantly, key pieces of work have been carried out on partnerships’ governance, accountability and performance arrangements by our Overview and Scrutiny (Resources) Committee. The Committee has reviewed the effectiveness of the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership and other key partnerships such as the Longridge Partnership, Clitheroe the Future, Whalley Action Group and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Risk profiles have been developed for the Council’s six main partnerships – East Lancashire e-Partnership, Lancashire Waste Partnership, Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Lancashire Area Agreement and the Shared Services Contact Centre Partnership. Risk champions have been identified for each of the partnerships and they are responsible for the continuous identification of emerging risks and controls. These risks are reviewed in accordance with the timetable, as outlined in our Risk Management Policy. All risk profiles are documented on the Council’s risk management IT system – ‘GRACE’.

2 PRIORITISATION

There is a clear link between our vision for the Ribble Valley and our supporting priorities and outcome-focused objectives.

Our priorities are based on the ambitions of our residents as well as having regard to national, regional and sub-regional issues. They also take into consideration the needs of minority and potentially disadvantaged groups, such as remote rural communities, the elderly, disabled and our black and minority ethnic community.

We made a conscious decision to maintain a balance of national and local priorities within our CP&IP. Our ambitions incorporate national priorities, for example:

- **Safe and Strong communities** – To make people’s lives safer and healthier
- **Sustainable communities** - over-arching aim to recognise the importance of securing a diverse, sustainable economic base for the Borough
- **Tackling health inequalities** - To make people’s lives safer and healthier
- **Serving the needs of diverse communities** –the Council’s core values: to ensure that access to services is available to all; to treat everyone equally; and to respect all individuals and their views.

In addition, we have stated how we will deliver on issues that are important to local people, such as improving environmental quality.

Our corporate ambitions are clear and challenging. Each ambition is split into specific objectives supported by an action plan, which have SMART targets for delivery over a three-year period to 2010.

Our objectives are:

- To reduce the levels and perceptions of crime and disorder
- To increase opportunities for people to access cultural activities
- To improve the health of people living in our area
- To recycle and compost 56% of all waste by 2015 in accordance with our Waste Management Strategy
- To provide a high quality environment, keeping land clear of litter and refuse, and reducing the incidents of dog fouling
- To conserve our countryside, the natural beauty of the area and enhance our built environment
- To provide additional affordable homes throughout the Ribble Valley, particularly in the rural communities
- To meet the housing needs of the community
- To improve and maintain the condition of the private sector housing stock, particularly in relation to pre 1919 properties and bring empty properties back into use.

Once again, sound research is the basis for these objectives, and the strategies and plans that support them:

- Our housing needs assessments across the borough and consultation, especially with parish councils, informed the provision of additional affordable homes throughout the Ribble Valley, particularly in the rural communities
- We appreciate the value of consulting with our citizens and our staff, using Feedb@ck surveys and Best Value General Household Satisfaction surveys (BVGHSS) for setting and reviewing our priorities.

There is a clear ‘Golden Thread’ flowing from the draft SCS, to the CP&IP, with priorities cascading down into our robust service plans and strategies. All service plans clearly show the link between community, council and service objectives.

Councillors, staff, service users, partners and other stakeholders understand our key strategic objectives. This has been addressed through the circulation of the SCS and the CP&IP to all councillors and staff. Corporate and Service objectives are discussed with staff during performance appraisals to ensure that they understand their specific roles. In addition, all documents are placed on our Intranet

Focus

Our Forward Looking Work Plan, introduced in 2005, provides an innovative and simple approach to setting short-term priorities for the Council, selecting from our longer-range plans those things we need to focus on most for the coming 12 months.

Progress on our Forward Looking Work Plan is monitored and reported to Corporate Management Team and to staff at meetings every quarter.

Our High Level Improvement Plan was developed following our previous CPA inspection and now incorporates issues from recent Audit Commission inspections and the Use of Resources audit. The Council also has an improvement plan for Corporate Governance. The Corporate Management Team monitors both these improvement plans regularly. In particular, the plan to address issues arising from the Use of Resources audit has been successfully implemented, resulting in improved performance and a higher score for 2005/06.

Another way in which we retain focus is through our Overview and Scrutiny function. The Chairs of both Overview and Scrutiny committees provide necessary leadership and are focused on challenging performance across a number of areas.

The impact of scrutiny work is illustrated by:

- Providing a critical challenge of delivery of priorities with our key partnerships, including examining the effectiveness of Lancashire Locals

- Scrutinising the transfer of our housing stock prior to the Council decision to transfer
- Proactive monitoring of sickness absence figures has helped to maintain a reduction in sickness levels
- Reviewing our complaints procedures
- Review of the way that our grants scheme to voluntary organisations is administered

future development of the service which, if approved, would require additional resources

- Outlining possibilities for maximising income including, external funding
- Outlining service priorities for the next three years

Draft service plans are then scrutinised by the Corporate Management Team and service committees who provide an external challenge on:

- How services are contributing to the CP&IP and delivering the Council's priorities
- How budgets are structured
- Value for Money
- Achievement of quality and standards of service

This rigorous approach clearly links budget setting to service delivery and achieving the Council's corporate priorities.

Our Capital Strategy and the Asset Management Plan are also aligned to the CP&IP priorities.

“Financial and asset management arrangements at the Council have improved and have resulted in increased scores for two of the three key lines of enquiry within this theme. More specifically, the Council has reviewed and improved its medium term financial strategy (MTFS) and asset related strategies and management plans. A Councillor Champion has been identified to take responsibility for asset management issues and the Council now has a Corporate Property Function in place.”²¹ Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

We have also moved resources into higher priority areas. Examples in 2007/08 include:

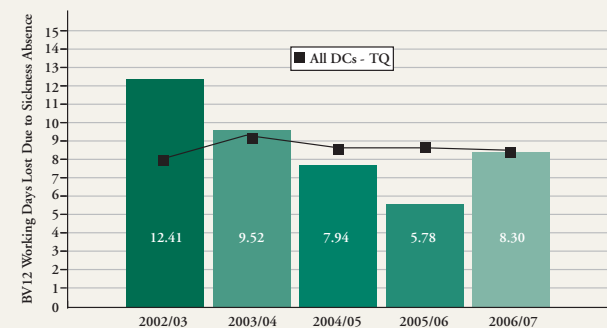
- £67k to help fund improvements in waste management
- £24k to fund the development of our Shared Services Contact Centre – to provide a more customer focused service

Overall we can demonstrate additional spending in line with our ambitions in 2007/08 as follows:

- To help make people's lives SAFER AND HEALTHIER
 - Appointment of an additional Environmental Health Advisor (£27k)
 - Appointment of a Health and Safety officer (£25k)
 - Shared in the costs of appointing 2 Community Support officers (£11k)
- To PROTECT AND ENHANCE the existing ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY of our area
 - Invested in more resources for waste management and recycling (£67k)
 - Introduced three stream waste collection (£709k)

CASE STUDY – MANAGEMENT OF SICKNESS ABSENCE

The levels of staff sickness have been proactively managed downwards from 12.41 days in 2002/03 to 8.38 days in 2006/07.



We have a proven record in managing change whilst still maintaining our direction of travel. In the past three years we have:

- Carried out a Departmental and Senior Management restructure (strengthening corporate capacity in finance, performance and policy)
- Carried out a job evaluation exercise for all staff
- Introduced a Shared Services Contact Centre
- Investigated in detail the housing options appraisals, decided and commenced the process of transferring our housing stock.

Finance

The Council reviews its Medium Term Financial Strategy annually to ensure that we allocate our financial resources in line with our corporate priorities and to help inform the preparation of service plans. The production of service plans involves a 'budget and priority review', that considers the following:

- Identification of financial resources available
- Assessment of efficiencies and possible areas for reduction, including diverting existing resources
- Maximising the opportunities presented by the Contact Centre i.e. identification of services for transfer into and delivery by the Contact Centre
- Responding to the implications arising from the possible transfer of the housing stock in 2008
- Identification of opportunities and requests for additional resources - information regarding any opportunities for

- To MATCH the SUPPLY OF HOMES in our area with the IDENTIFIED HOUSING NEED
 - Payment of landlord/tenant grants (£100k)
 - Equity release loans (£138k)
 - Payment of disabled facility grants (£120k)
 - Council house improvements (£844k)

We have a good track record in identifying efficiencies and our latest reported Gershon savings were £843k against a target of £330k, of which £460k were cashable savings.

Our upward direction of travel in recent years is due to a strong focus on priorities and performance management:

- **External audit and inspection** – since the Corporate Assessment of 2003 we have acted upon recommendations made by our external auditors and the Audit Commission. The majority of these have been completed and the remainder are on track for completion.
- **Risks** are reviewed as follows: Red - monthly, Amber - every 3 months, Green - every 6 months. Internal Audit monitors the carrying out of reviews through the production of reports from the GRACE software. The Risk Management Working Group monitors performance.
- **Performance management** - analysis of key performance indicators over the past year shows that 40% have improved compared to an average of 47-49% for other councils, suggesting that the Council is not improving services as quickly as others. However, Ribble Valley has 39% of PIs above the best quartile breakpoint compared to an average of 33% for other councils, clearly illustrating that a significant number of services are already delivering high performance. We are already performing better than many 'excellent' district councils.²²

What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

3 CAPACITY

We recognise that people are vital to what we do, and that properly trained and equipped members and staff are essential to the achievement of our ambitions.

In 2004, our corporate assessment highlighted more weaknesses than strengths in the capacity of the Council to deliver its priorities. The assessment stated that the capacity of senior officers was stretched due to a variety of factors including competing operational and strategic responsibilities. This was resulting in competing demands and a reduced capacity to focus on priorities.

In 2004 "Solace Enterprises" undertook a review of management and departmental structures at the Council. This review resulted in the Chief Executive being made a 'stand

alone' post supported by a small corporate policy team and 3 Corporate Directors retaining responsibility for the performance within their departments. The service functions were re-organised to enable better co-ordination of key services and 12 service managers were appointed including the appointment of a Corporate Services Manager.

Ribble Valley Borough Council does not have the resources or capacity to do everything we would want to do at the same time, but we plan well and are committed to the continuous improvement of our services.

In common with other small district councils, staffing levels are sometimes stretched at times of peak activity, such as elections. We recognise the problem and seek to use staff flexibly.

Where necessary, we employ temporary staff and we use external consultants, such as structural engineers, quantity surveyors and valuers, either to relieve the strain or to cover areas of expertise that we do not have in-house.

We have a good record of using alternative methods of service delivery to enhance our capacity. Examples include:

- The 24 hour monitoring of our CCTV system is combined with the monitoring of all of our elderly persons' dwellings and our emergency call system.
- The Shared Services Contact Centre project harnesses the benefits of new technology to provide increased capacity and improved customer service.
- As part of a countywide collaboration in the wake of Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement, we have combined enforcement of on-street and off-street parking under the banner of Parkwise. In Ribble Valley, the enforcement is carried out by council staff. We are now operating a function on behalf of the county council because of the demonstrable efficiency gains we could offer. At a county council scrutiny inquiry, the efficiency of the Ribble Valley operation was recognised as 'leading the field'.
- The Council will relocate the present fitness centre from Longridge High School to Longridge Civic Hall in early 2008, in order to provide improved access. This opportunity arose through the provision of a children's centre by Lancashire County Council at the Civic Hall. The joint project will deliver an extension to the rear of the building with a dedicated fitness centre, sharing the entrance and reception area. The estimated cost of the Council's proportion of the scheme will be £214,600, jointly funded by Sport England, East Lancashire PCT and this Council.
- Roefield Leisure Centre, Clitheroe - The Council was the main funder when the Centre was built to be operated by a charitable trust. Since then, the Council has been the major financial supporter by revenue, grant and loan support in order to help the Centre offer sports facilities in Clitheroe.

More recently, by using the Centre as a principal delivery site for our exercise referral scheme, we have helped to expand the Centre's customer base and income stream.

Since 2006 the Council has worked closely with the County Council and other Lancashire districts to develop 'Transforming Lancashire' – detailed proposals to improve two-tier working within the county. The paper was submitted to DCLG in January 2007 and the proposals are currently being taken forward by Lancashire Chief Executives, North West Improvement Network, and the North West Centre of Excellence as part of preparing a North West Improvement Strategy that will set out opportunities for increased joint working and the provision of Shared Services across Lancashire.

Elected Members

Member development focuses on skills and knowledge requirements necessary for their role and has included a range of activity including member induction, overview and scrutiny training, attendance at LGA conference and planning training. In addition 14 members have taken part in CLAIT or ECDL courses. Reports on member development activity are reviewed by Personnel Committee.

We have developed a Members Planning Reference manual and this will be used in the development of a national online planning training module.²³

We have provided a Secure Internet Portal for Councillors. This enables them to access their Councillor emails, confidential Committee reports and our Intranet via the web. Councillors have been provided with the necessary training.

Members and officers are clear about their differing roles and responsibilities and work well together. We introduced role descriptions for members following the Council elections in May 2003.

Our Workforce

An important part of the Performance Appraisal System is to identify the training needs of all staff. Training is clearly linked to the particular function and targets for that member of staff. This ensures that training is used both to develop our staff and to further the ambitions and priorities of the Council.

All staff training needs are identified in an overall Organisational Development plan so that there is no duplication of resources, and corporate training needs can be catered for on a council-wide basis rather than departmentally. Training needs are also identified in annual service plans.

One important training need, which has been identified through the appraisal process, is the use of information technology. Recognising this, we have worked with Accrington and Rossendale College to provide CLAIT and ECDL courses "in-house". These courses have proved popular and over the last 3 years over 70 members of staff have taken part in ECDL or CLAIT courses.

All officers have up to date job descriptions, which are reviewed annually as part of the performance appraisal process.

Modern HR practices are in place and continue to be developed. Examples of our good practice include:

- Flexible working policies – staff have access to a range of flexible working options, including flexi-time, a parental leave scheme, home working and job sharing.
- Employee well-being – the Council continues to adopt a pro-active approach to absence management. The Council also offers staff access to osteopathy and counselling services.

We are proud of the strong commitment and dedication of our staff. An Employee survey in 2007 revealed the following positive points:

- 91% think the Council is a good organisation to work for
- 60.9% are satisfied with their job
- 88.4% felt proud to work for Ribble Valley Borough Council
- 70.5% felt that the Council emphasises the importance of the customer
- 76.9% felt that providing high quality service is part of the Council's culture
- 62.2% felt they are encouraged to find better ways of doing things.

The Corporate Management Team monitors staff numbers, vacancies, training and sickness absence on a quarterly basis and implements appropriate actions where required. All staff who leave receive an exit interview carried out 'independently' by our personnel staff to identify their reasons for leaving and their impressions of the Council. Personnel Committee receives reports on staff training, staff turnover and staff absence.

We have become better at celebrating our success and praising staff for their achievements.²⁴

We have for many years employed modern apprentices in each of the Council's departments, many of whom have been then appointed to permanent positions. Every year we also open our doors to work experience students.

Leadership and Accountability

Improvements in our capacity since 2004 have included strengthening our political and managerial leadership, improving our corporate governance and financial management, and aligning our financial planning and service planning.

Since 2005 the Council has collaborated with its East Lancashire neighbours on a strategic leadership development programme. This attracted significant funding (£200K) from the North West Improvement Network (NWIN). The success of the 'year 1' programme was such that the programme has now been rolled out across Lancashire. Chief officers, members and service managers have participated in the programme and additional members and service managers will take part in the next round if the programme is able to secure funding for a further year.

We are more outwardly focused, learning from others and opening ourselves up to external scrutiny and inspection. We have developed links with the IDeA and welcome constructive challenge from our peers and our partners – both within Lancashire and beyond - as a vehicle for further improvement.

Accountability for performance and decision-making is clear, and relationships between Councillors and Corporate Management Team are effective and professional. Corporate Management Team meets both the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrat Group every 8 weeks to discuss strategic policy and service matters.

Our constitution, which was thoroughly updated in 2005, is reviewed annually by the Accounts and Audit Committee and the Standards Committee, and by Corporate Management Team every three months to ensure that it remains appropriate and up to date.

There is a clear scheme of delegation to officers. The delegation of decisions on planning applications was extended in April 2003 in order to improve our speed of determination.

The Council's Policy and Finance Committee approved a revised Members Code of Conduct in June 2007. All members have registered specific interests as required by the code. Members are able to seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer in relation to any issues which arise, particularly those relating to declarations of interest. Our Standards Committee has an independent chairman and includes 2 parish councillors.

Member champions support the process of continuous improvement in key areas – such as Asset Management and Equality and Diversity.

We have successfully completed a job evaluation exercise to ensure that we meet our obligations as an employer under

equal pay legislation. Several appeals are still pending and a small number of equal pay claims are being processed.

Equalities

One of the few areas where our performance is below the general level achieved by most other councils is our performance against the Equality Standard:

- Top 5% of earners who are women – currently 25%,
- Top 5% of earners from BME – currently 0%,
- % of disabled in workforce is decreasing and is now 3.61%, compared with the economically active disabled community figure of 12.62%
- BME in workforce stands at 0.6%, in comparison to the economically active BME community figure of 1.4%
- However, top 5% of earners who are disabled – currently 6.25%, is top quartile for a district council.

The Council is working hard to improve in this important area. We have confirmed our commitment to the Equalities Standard for Local Government and approved a Comprehensive Equality Policy in November 2007.

This work follows support and training from the IDeA to improve our performance against the standard, which included 10 days' consultancy support from their equalities specialist department – 'Dialog'. A diagnostic assessment of our current position in relation to the Equalities Standard along with the production of recommendations and an action plan to implement the standard were completed in May 2007.

We have established an Equality and Diversity Steering Group, chaired by the Chief Executive, which includes a 'member champion' to co-ordinate, and mainstream all council activity in relation to equality and diversity issues.

All service managers have carried out a self-assessment of their services to identify the level of impact our policies and procedures have on minority groups.

The steering group has reviewed the self-assessments and three customer-facing services are currently completing detailed Equality Impact Assessments.

All service plans require that consideration be given to Equality and Diversity to ensure that the services we provide treat everyone fairly and equally in line with our core values.

Our BVGHSS revealed top quartile performance for 2 of the questions relating to diversity and equality:

- 87% of respondents agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together
- 80% of respondents think the Council treats all types of people fairly.

Partnership Working

We have long recognised the value of partnership working in helping us to achieve our ambitions and deliver high quality services.

We have entered partnership and collaboration arrangements and sought out solutions to develop our capacity and generate efficiency savings. We are proud of our track record of successes, which include, in addition to those already mentioned:

- A joint Housing and Council Tax Benefit application form has been developed in collaboration with four other Lancashire districts²⁵ resulting in costs savings and improved customer satisfaction.
- A joint Council Tax leaflet was produced in 2007 with Lancashire County Council, Lancashire Fire Authority and eight other districts, which resulted in cost savings.
- The online Revenues and Benefits 'mandofoms' were created through the East Lancashire e-Partnership.
- People with severe physical and learning disabilities now live independently in a purpose-built bungalow in Clitheroe town centre. The bungalow was built in partnership with St Vincent's Housing Association and Lancashire County Council.²⁶
- Supporting People is a strong and successful partnership with Lancashire County Council, probation services, PCT's and all Lancashire district councils to assist various client groups to obtain and sustain a home. The range of client groups assisted include the elderly, homeless, young people, people with learning and physical disabilities, ex-offenders, substance abusers and those with enduring mental illness.
- Change for Children is a new approach to securing the well-being of children and young people, underpinned by the Children Act 2004. The stakeholders are Lancashire County Council and the twelve district councils in Lancashire who are developing a partnership approach to improve outcomes for children and young people. District councils and the County Council are developing awareness and capacity to ensure that the arrangements for joint working for children and young people are more effectively co-ordinated. Within Ribble Valley, a lead officer and member champion have now been appointed and the LSP has introduced a thematic group which specifically addresses the needs of children and young people.
- The principles of 'Dual Use' at Longridge High School have been established as good practice for some time. However the changes in roles and responsibilities over the last 10 years had made the old agreement for key leisure services increasingly difficult and inappropriate. The Council and the school have agreed new arrangements that protects both the interests of young people whilst at school, and by relocating fitness facilities into a nearby Civic Hall improves access for target groups and supports the Civic Hall's business plan.

- The Clitheroe Castle Museum is jointly managed by the Council and Lancashire County Council's Museums Service. We provide the building and staff with the Museums service providing curatorial support. The Council has successfully secured a £2m Heritage Lottery Grant towards a £3.2m project to re-develop the Museum. The partnership will continue and will be extended when the new museum is completed in early July 2009.
- The Council's partnership with Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board maximises Ribble Valley's potential and resources to participate and benefit in high profile regional, national and international marketing and PR campaigns.
- The Council's annual contribution to the 'Country Escapes campaign' helps to raise the district's overall profile more than would be achieved working individually. Examples include joint presence at the Outdoor Show exhibition at the NEC Birmingham. The Tourist Board's ICT resources have helped the Council develop its website content on visitlancashire.com, visitbritain.com and enjoyengland.com
- National Partner Authority Scheme – Building Control - A professional agent such as an architect can 'sign up' with a Local Authority, who will then assess that architect's plans for compliance with Building Regulations anywhere within England and Wales. Building Control services within Lancashire have signed up to the 'Lancashire Agreement'. This agreement allows building control work and staff to be transferred between councils. We have assisted Hyndburn and Burnley councils and received assistance from Craven DC in the north east of our area.

Corporate Governance and Risk Management

We have improved our corporate governance arrangements over the last three years, and this was reflected in a 'Good', 3 out of 4 score for internal control in the Use of Resources assessment in 2006.

The Council's improvement plan for corporate governance, which is monitored regularly by the Corporate Management Team, has led to significant improvements.

In particular, issues arising from the Use of Resources audit have been successfully implemented. We continue to promote and maintain high ethical standards. The 2006 Use of Resources assessment highlighted a number of areas of sound practice, including our Standards Committee, our Code of Conduct for members/officers, and our anti-fraud procedures.

"Internal Control is a strong area for the Council with key policies and procedures demonstrating a robust assurance framework, risk management strategy and a counter fraud culture. The role of Internal Audit and staff within the benefits service are vital in providing the assurance for this theme. The Council's Standards Committee has started to meet and this should improve the Council's compliance with ethical codes."

The Council demonstrates a good record of recovering funds arising from proven cases of fraud and has communicated its actions to reiterate its stance on fraud and corruption amongst councillors and officers" ²⁷ **Annual Audit and Inspection Letter**

The BVGHSS found that 79% of respondents think the Council is trustworthy and this is top quartile performance.

Our approach to risk management is comprehensive and effective, with the strategy directly aligned to our corporate priorities.

A Risk Management Awareness Training Session was carried out in June 2005 for all Service Managers following the move from CARE software to GRACE. This was followed by a further seven training sessions for staff, with all training material being made available on the Intranet.

Risk registers are on the GRACE risk management software and are automatically updated each time a change to the risk profile is made. An audit trail of all changes to risk profiles is stored within the system. The Overview and Scrutiny (Resources) Committee consider all red risks on a six monthly basis along with a report detailing the progress made over the past six months.

Departmental red risks are identified in the appropriate annual Service Plans.

Financial Standing

Our financial position is strong, and we hold £1.3m in General Fund Balances and £2.9m in Earmarked Reserves. We have continued to improve our approach to the management of those reserves, which this year has resulted in setting aside £300,000 for funding community projects. This amount was specifically for schemes in Longridge, for Parish Council initiatives and for community groups. The grants are being directed towards those issues that local people say they are most concerned about -

- To protect and enhance the quality of life in villages and towns,
- To make people's lives safer and healthier,
- To improve access to services, and
- (for parish councils) to refurbish children's play areas and village halls and to provide traffic speed indicators.

Financial standing is a strong area for the Council. The Council's Finance staff work closely with budget holders to ensure expenditure and income is monitored on a regular basis. Accounts are closed on time and our reserves and balances are adequate to meet overall spending plans.

Our track record on achieving value for money is good. The Audit Commission rated us 2 out of 4 on VFM in our Use of Resources assessment 2006.

CASE STUDY - VALUE FOR MONEY

At just £124.93 per head of population our expenditure is the 50th lowest amongst 238 districts.²⁸ Council tax levels are similarly low in comparison to other districts, with Ribble Valley's average band D equivalent council tax for 2007/08 (excluding parish precepts) being the lowest in Lancashire and falling within the 22% lowest in England (£128.65). This reflects our long-standing policy as set out in our Medium Term Financial Strategy to limit council tax increases.

That the Council can successfully achieve value for money of this magnitude whilst delivering services across the most sparsely populated district in Lancashire, adds a further burden of proof that the Council is exceedingly efficient in the way it spends public money. This is further demonstrated by considering the recent report of our Environment Inspection, a 'Good' service with 'Promising Prospects for Improvement' that is delivered at the 2nd lowest cost within the Council's family group of similar authorities.²⁹

The BVGHSS found that 60% of respondents think the Council provides good value for money. This is top quartile performance and 8th best nationally.

Our Use of Resources assessment has shown improvement each year even though the standards have been continually increased.

*"The Council has made good progress overall in addressing the issues identified in the audit of its use of resources...Discussions with key officers support the Council's commitment to improving its value for money arrangements"*³⁰ **Annual Audit & Inspection Letter**

4 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

CPA Inspectors in 2004 concluded that our weaknesses outweighed our strengths in this area. However, over the last three years we have taken significant actions to address the weaknesses. The following actions were included in our Improvement Plan, developed following our last inspection, and have been completed in accordance with that plan.

- We have introduced a comprehensive Performance Management Framework for council services
- We have undertaken a comprehensive review of all our service plans and ensured a consistent approach throughout the organisation
- We have linked budget setting to Corporate priorities
- We monitor service improvement plans
- We have reviewed and improved our procedures for collecting, managing and using performance data
- We monitor and compare our performance using appropriate Performance Indicators

- We have improved local and national performance indicators

A corporate style for all service plans has been developed. A template has been produced, along with detailed guidance notes, and senior managers have received training to ensure layout and content is consistent across the organisation.

Service plans for all our services are produced annually and these set out what the service is trying to achieve, detail the activities and resources within the service area and, most importantly, describe specific measurable actions to ensure a clear focus and to secure continuous improvement. Service plans are reviewed twice a year by service committees to ensure that our priorities are being delivered.

A Performance Management and Budget Setting timetable has been developed, to align service planning with our budget setting process. The timetable defines when draft plans are to be completed, and at what stage both Corporate Management Team and committee working groups are to review them. The process ensures that all our service plans are strictly aligned to the Council's priorities.

We regularly collect data and monitor our performance, not only by using the National Best Value Performance Indicators, but also a variety of locally determined indicators.

Each service has developed its own local targets to measure performance in delivering priorities and meeting local needs.

A recent review of our local indicators³¹ sought to reduce the number of indicators, whilst ensuring they had increased relevance. The revised indicators only include those local indicators that are useful for the effective monitoring of either the service or corporate priorities.

The indicators can be useful to monitor progress against objectives set in both the SCS and our CP&IP.

The Council's Citizens Charter, which was reviewed and updated in June 2007, sets out the standards by which we deliver our services to people in the Ribble Valley. Local indicators are used, where appropriate, to monitor these standards.

A monitoring schedule for all indicators, strategies and plans ensures clarity of responsibility and that progress is monitored at the appropriate level.

The Corporate Management Team examines a basket of key corporate performance indicators on a quarterly basis. This includes:

- Staffing - including vacancies, absence and training
- Council Tax and NNDR - percentage collected
- Environment - including percentage of waste recycled
- Sale of Assets - including Council house sales

Performance Management and Member Involvement

We have fully implemented and rolled out our performance management software (Covalent) to all directors, managers and relevant employees to help them manage performance more effectively, as well as streamlining reporting and management on a corporate basis. As the system is web based we are also able to roll the system out to elected members. All Committee chairs and shadow chairs have access to up to date performance management information. This was introduced as part of the member induction programme following the elections in May 2007. Member involvement in performance management has resulted in Performance Clinics being introduced, members are receiving training in the use of the Covalent system and are becoming more involved in target setting.

The Overview and Scrutiny (Resources) Committee plays a key role in improving performance. Exception reports on the monitoring of all indicators are presented to the Committee on a quarterly basis. Performance Indicators are used to highlight weaknesses in service delivery, so that corrective action can be taken and, where necessary, increased resources made available.

An example of our success is in our development control department, where members challenged our average time for determining planning applications which had historically been in the bottom quartile. The use of delegation to officers ensured that our performance in this area has dramatically improved in recent years.

Service managers regularly report on performance in their service areas to relevant service committees to ensure that the services stay on track.³²

Performance Improvement

Through rigorous performance management we identify where we are off track, and what we need to do to improve, including allocating additional resources and targeted support where appropriate. This has led to significant improvements in recent years in services such as development control, housing, waste management and street scene, as well as sickness absence.

Our increasing focus on performance in recent years is evidenced by our improving Direction of Travel. The figures speak for themselves. Our analysis of all comparable indicators shows that in:

- 2004/2005 – 40.4% of key indicators showed improvement and 33% were top quartile
- 2005/2006 – 32.6% of key indicators showed improvement and 34% were top quartile.
- 2006/2007 – 41.9% of key indicators showed improvement

We review and compare our approach to the best on a regular basis in order to continually improve. The Revenues and Benefits service has been involved in the Lancashire Chief Financial Officers' (Revenues and Benefits) benchmarking group since its inception. The group meets regularly and compares all aspects of service delivery to identify best practice and areas that need improvement. The group has been acknowledged by the Department of Communities and Local Government as an example of good practice in its Council Tax Good Practice Guide.

Corporate Services staff recently attended a Beacon Performance Management event held by Rotherham Council. As a result of this we have introduced the use of Performance Clinics to improve areas of poor performance.

CASE STUDY - PERFORMANCE CLINICS

Street Cleanliness – following a recent report to Overview and Scrutiny (Res) Committee members requested a Performance Clinic to be arranged to look more closely at BVPI's 199a, b and c. The committee report highlighted that we performed poorly in this PI in comparison to other district councils. The clinic is arranged to take place during December 2007 and will lead to improved performance due to continuous monitoring and the implementation of an action plan.

Involvement in user groups allows us to learn from other councils on best practice. The Council is an active member in the Covalent (Performance Management system) User Group Meetings, which are held regionally³³ and nationally.³⁴ All major computer systems operating within the Council have an associated user group, of which we are members.

We have also looked at how other Councils have managed projects or implemented new systems/ways of doing things. These include visits to similar councils who have recently completed the transfer of their housing stock to see if there was anything we could learn from them.³⁵ In relation to our strategic housing function we have received a presentation from Harrogate BC who are a Beacon Council. To complete our Job Evaluation exercise we have used the GLEA scheme, after evaluating its effectiveness at other councils especially Pendle BC.

We have a well-publicised, clear and recently updated complaints procedure, which includes the consideration of complaints quarterly by the Corporate Management Team. In addition Overview and Scrutiny (Services) reviews all complaints annually. This is to ensure that where appropriate we can learn from our mistakes.

We have a corporate system for customer contacts, complaints, comments, suggestions, and questions. This will be strengthened by the introduction of our customer relationship management system in December 2007, which will provide detailed management information on all aspects

of customer contact on a daily basis. This will enable us to build up a profile of our customers, measure performance against our customer charter promises and monitor service delivery to different customer groups.

Performance Culture

There is a clear process for cascading priorities through from the CP&IP to the service plans, and then throughout the organisation.

This is largely achieved through our Staff Performance Appraisal System, which has been in place for some 14 years and has been reviewed and updated throughout that period, and is regarded as vital to our performance. Targets are set annually for every member of staff, from members of the Corporate Management Team downwards. There is an interim appraisal after six months, to ensure that progress is being made towards these targets, and a final appraisal after twelve months, when a written report is produced and handed to the member of staff. This not only comments on their performance over the previous twelve months but sets targets for the forthcoming twelve months.

Whilst carrying out performance appraisals, managers check the progress of their staff by reference to the Council's overall ambitions, objectives set in individual Service Plans and the performance indicators for that particular service.

The successful implementation of this system was highlighted in the recent Employee Satisfaction Survey,³⁶ where nearly three quarters (74.3%) of respondents agreed that through performance management and appraisals they know what their key accountabilities are. This is a significant increase from 2004, when only just over half of respondents (52.2%) knew their key accountabilities. We have also seen a significant increase in the number of staff who know what their annual objectives are - 75% in comparison to 60% in 2004. The fact that such a high proportion of respondents are informed in the Performance Management and Appraisal System is very positive and affirms its role in providing clarity for ensuring role focus / objectives for employees.

Financial Management

We are justly proud of our good record of sound financial management and our external auditors have consistently praised us in this respect.

*"The Council maintained its healthy financial position during the year, demonstrated by a general reserve balance of £1.3m at 31 March 2007 (£2.2m 31 March 2006). In line with its revised medium term financial strategy, the Council has utilised existing balances towards priorities specified within its Corporate Strategy and supporting Service plans....The Council now has a clearer view of the recurrent balances that need to be maintained over the medium term, more reasonably reflecting the Council's funding requirements, whilst balancing risk."*³⁷

Pricewaterhouse Coopers

The BVGHSS revealed that 75% of respondents think the Council is efficient and well run, this is top quartile performance and also 7th best nationally.

Our strong financial position means that, where necessary, we can increase resources in a particular area in line with our overall ambitions and in the light of performance information.

Our external auditors, using the Audit Commission's Use of Resources KLOE, have assessed us in securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources. A number of factors are considered including a review of corporate governance, value for money, risk, and probity. They recently concluded that the Council continues to demonstrate many of the key characteristics of sound financial management. We are confident of maintaining our scored judgement of 3, which was achieved in 2005/2006.

All of our budgets are monitored regularly by the Corporate Management Team, as is progress with the Council's Capital Programme. Service committees and the Policy and Finance Committee receive quarterly monitoring reports on revenue and capital budgets. In addition, the Budget Working Group carries out an essential role by monitoring our overall financial performance. The group is made up of cross-party senior councillors, the Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Financial Services Manager. The Group, which is chaired by the Leader of the Council, makes recommendations directly to the Policy and Finance Committee.

*"The Council is in a very strong financial position owing to the healthy level of general reserves built up in recent years. The Council demonstrates key characteristics of strong financial management by both officers and members."*³⁸ **Annual Audit and Inspection Letter**

Risk Management

The authority uses Auditware's GRACE risk management software. This helps to identify those areas where there are particular risks to individual services. We have an up to date Risks Register. Since 2003 the Risk Management Strategy Working Group has co-ordinated this important work.

Communicating Performance

We publicise our performance in a variety of ways. Performance against key indicators is publicised in the Council Tax leaflet,³⁹ our Council newspaper 'Ribble Valley News', which is delivered twice yearly to all our residents, on our website, Intranet, staff newsletter, 'Backchat', and in our annual CP&IP, which is produced and published in accordance with statutory guidelines. The Council's annual CP&IP includes information on all aspects of our performance, including all indicators, some financial and budgetary information, and information on value for money. The Plan not only reports on how the Council has performed

in the previous year, but also sets out plans to improve performance in areas where targets have not been met or are not comparable with similar councils.

We will produce a new Annual Report in December 2007, which will report on our achievements, performance and financial management. This will be made available in an easy to read format to all our residents, and key stakeholders and will be placed on our website.

Information about performance is also regularly produced by the Council's partnerships, for example the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership regularly produce statistics.⁴⁰ The partnership shares an Analyst with neighbouring Hyndburn to provide quarterly reports on PSA1 targets for the Ribble Valley and give analysis of levels and trends.

The BVGHSS found that:

- 62% of respondents feel very or fairly well informed about what the Council spends its money on. This is top quartile performance.
- 58% of respondents feel very or fairly well informed about what standard of service should be expected from the Council. This is top quartile.
- 41% of respondents feel very or fairly well informed about whether the Council is delivering on its promises. This is top quartile.
- 42% of respondents feel very or fairly well informed about how well the Council is performing. This is top quartile.

What has been achieved?

5 ACHIEVEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

We are proud to be able to demonstrate that the investment we have made in focusing on our priorities has led to significant increases in customer satisfaction and our performance.

Customer Views

Our BVGHSS carried out towards the end of 2006 showed that we are Best in the North West for overall satisfaction with the Council. We scored well for the key measure of overall satisfaction (BV 3) with 63% for 2006/07, consistent with our high performances of 69% for 2003/04 and 74% in 2000/01. The top quartile satisfaction level is 60% for 2006/07.

The survey found that the main factor making Ribble Valley a good place to live is the low level of crime followed by provision of health services and encouragingly fewer residents felt they were in need of improving. Three key improvements were identified; activities for teenagers (44.8%), road & pavement repairs (42.1%) and affordable decent housing (scoring highly in the most important factors to make a good place to live and most needing improving). A clear priority for

local people identified in this research is accommodation which is affordable for local people.

Other results from the BVGHSS showed:

- BV 89 – 77% of respondents were satisfied with the Council for keeping land clear of litter and refuse. This performance puts us in the top quartile, again with the best performance in the North West
- BV 90a – 80% of respondents were satisfied with the waste collection service overall (above average)
- BV 90b – 76% of respondents were satisfied with the provision of local recycling facilities overall (top quartile)
- BV 119e – 75% of respondents were satisfied with Parks and Open Spaces (above average)
- 95% of respondents felt very or fairly well informed about how to pay bills to the Council (top quartile and 2nd best nationally)
- 53% of respondents felt that the Council keeps residents very or fairly well informed about the services and benefits it provides (top quartile)
- 78% of residents think the Council is making the local area a better place to live (top quartile)
- 59% of respondents think the Council promotes the interests of local residents (top quartile)
- 62% of respondents think the Council acts on the concerns of local residents (top quartile)
- 91% of respondents who when thinking about the way the authority runs things, think it has got better or stayed the same over the last 3 years (top quartile and 6th best nationally)

The Best Value Benefits survey revealed that the Benefits Team at Ribble Valley is one of the best in the country. This Council was one of only two authorities in the country to be ranked in the top ten for all seven Benefits BVPI's. The survey rated the Council as first in the country in the telephone service and speed of service BVPI's, with satisfaction scores of 92% and 88% respectively. We also came second in the contact with the benefits office (90%), user-friendliness of benefits forms (77%) and overall satisfaction with the benefits service (92%).

We carried out a Cashiers Customer Satisfaction survey in 2006/07 – where 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that overall they are satisfied with how they can make payments to the council, 95% of users supported making a payment in person, and 92% were satisfied with how their payment was processed.

We also carried out a Council Tax and Business Rates Customer Satisfaction survey in 2006/07 – where 82.4% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were satisfied with the response that they got when they visited the section.

The results of a survey for those residents in areas where we have introduced the new three stream waste collection service show very high levels of satisfaction, with an amazing 97% satisfied or very satisfied with the new service.

*"The people I met were kind and helpful. They helped me through it all. I was very grateful I have nothing but praise for Ribble Valley"*⁴¹ **Property owner following grant assistance**

The Living and Working in East Lancashire Citizens' Panel survey carried out in Autumn 2006 shows:

- Ribble Valley has the highest perception with regard to the image of East Lancashire (70% state this to be good)
- Overall 80% feel they belong to their neighbourhood (78% 2004)
- 85% of respondents in Ribble Valley feel safe in their neighbourhood
- 56% of respondents in Ribble Valley agree that people from different backgrounds get on in their neighbourhood (this figure is higher than the overall figure for East Lancashire where just under half of respondents agreed)
- 87% of Ribble Valley respondents rate their neighbourhood as either an excellent or good place to live
- Only 38% feel their comments are not listened to by decision makers (compared to 45% in the rest of East Lancashire)

In addition to the achievements already mentioned throughout this assessment we have also made improvements and had achievements in the following areas.

Securing a diverse and sustainable economic base

- The Council contributes to the work of the Ribble Valley Enterprise Agency in the provision of support services for local businesses and individuals looking to establish their own business. During 2006/07 the agency enabled 103 new businesses to start in Ribble Valley.
- In addition, mainly in our rural areas, we work in partnership with Lancashire Rural Futures who have provided development and business support for some 6 years. Funding has principally come from national rural recovery monies following the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001 to provide a wide range of diverse businesses.
- In partnership with other Lancashire district councils and the Lancashire Economic Partnership we have developed an on-line commercial property resource called 'Evolutive', which provides web-based 'Grantfinder' to access information for new and expanding businesses and community initiatives.
- Our local business newsletter 'In-Business' was re-designed and re-launched in June 2007 and compliments our on-line Business Directory.
- We work with Community Futures who have led on a programme to re-vitalise Community Resource centres in the villages of Chipping, Chatburn, Gisburn and Slaidburn.

- The Council is the accountable body for the Market Town Enhancement Scheme, Leader+ schemes and European Regional Development Fund projects within the Ribble Valley.

CASE STUDY - ALSTON DAIRY, LONGRIDGE

This project involved investing in the existing dairy to increase production capacity from 300,000 pots of yoghurt per week to over 600,000 to meet ever increasing demand. Grant aid from several sources totalled over £170k safeguarding the jobs of 25 local people.

A well-managed Council

We have:

- Continued to improve the delivery of excellent services to our residents since our last CPA assessment in 2004, fully implemented our improvement plan that resulted from that inspection and considerably improved our performance management arrangements;
- Received only 7 complaints to the Ombudsman during 2006/07 relating to our services, compared with 11 complaints in 2005/06 and 7 complaints in 2004/05. The Ombudsman states 'that the number of complaints are too small from which to draw any meaningful conclusions, and she did not identify any underlying problems or concerns.'
- Implemented a new Financial Ledger system 'Financials' and migrated from 'Powersolve' to improve our financial management;
- Implemented a new Procurement system and trained all staff to ensure all orders are now electronic, replacing our paper-based system, and introduced an eMarket Place;
- Received a good Use of Resources assessment (scoring 3), which has shown improvement each year even though the standards have been continually increased;

*"The Council's performance in its use of resources continues to improve with significant improvement in those areas of financial management which were previously found to be below minimum requirements"*⁴² **Annual Audit and Inspection Letter**

- Developed the ability to pay creditors by BACS rather than by cheque;
- Developed a Corporate Communications Strategy;
- Made major revisions and improvements to our Asset Management Plan and Capital Strategy. In March 2007 our Asset Management Plan was extensively revised, improved and approved by the Council. An officer Asset Management Group chaired by the Chief Executive and including a 'Member Champion' meets quarterly to ensure that the best use is made of the Council's land and property assets;
- Produced a Data Quality Strategy in 2007, which is fully compliant with assessment criteria;

- Received noted improvement by the Planning Advisory Service (GONW) to our Development Control service, which now exceeds the standard targets in all three categories (BVPI 109a improved from 38% to 100% in 3 years);

*"I am very pleased to note that your Authority's planning performance has improved to a point that you are now exceeding the standard target in all three categories. I wish to particularly congratulate your Development Control staff who have worked hard to deliver these targets and to Mr John Macholc as Development Control Manager."*⁴³

GONW Deputy Regional Director

- Developed and adopted an Information Technology Strategy;
- Introduced an Accounts and Audit Committee in April 2006 to oversee and monitor our audit and inspection activity;
- Reviewed and updated our corporate Health and Safety policies and risk assessments and appointed a Health and Safety Advisor;
- Successfully achieved I.E.G Priority Outcomes and adopted e-government practices, including on-line payments, improved Council web-site compliant with eGif accessibility standards, and ongoing introduction of county/district Shared Services Contact Centre;
- Declared 100% against BV157 in IEG6, achieved 43 of 54 priority outcomes for local e-government, and our website is rated W3C AA compliant;
- Won an LGA award for Procurement in partnership with the other East Lancashire authorities in 2005;
- Regular top quartile performance across all six Performance Measures for Housing Benefit Service (Department for Work and Pensions);
- Developed a new Corporate Business Continuity Plan;
- Achieved the highest Council Tax collection rate in Lancashire and easily within top quartile for all districts;
- Provided the Council Chambers for weekly prayers by the Muslim community in Clitheroe until planning permission was granted to convert a former chapel into a mosque/multi-faith centre.

*"The Council continues to work closely with the local community and faith groups and has recently approved a planning application for a multi-faith centre in Clitheroe."*⁴⁴ **Annual Audit and Inspection Letter**

To help make people's lives Safer and Healthier

We have:

- Worked in partnership to make Ribble Valley the safest place to live in the North West, with only 27.1 offences per 1000 population (12th lowest in the country). The CDRP

is currently ahead of its target to reduce crime by 13.5% by 31 March 2008. Performance has recently been described as 'stunning' by the local Police Superintendent;

- 72% of respondents to the BVGHSS think the Council is working to make the area safer. This is top quartile performance and 9th best nationally. 26% of respondents feel very or fairly well informed about what the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in the local area, again this is top quartile performance;
- In 2006/07, made £100,000 available through the Medium Term Financial Strategy to Parish Councils and groups dealing with recreation and village hall matters. 24 Parish Councils and groups received grants varying from £150 to £15,000 to help with a variety of projects including improving access for disabled people to Bolton-by-Bowland village hall, a youth shelter in Ribchester and speed indicator devices in several villages;
- In 2006/07, made £100,000 in grant aid available to local organisations. The overall aims of the grant were to: protect and enhance the quality of life in Ribble Valley towns and villages; make people's lives safer and healthier or improve access to services. Grants ranging from £250 to £8,500 were awarded to 39 organisations throughout the borough;
- In 2006/07, made £88,500 grant aid available to support 15 local voluntary organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Victim Support and Lancashire Shop Mobility;
- Employed drugs education workers to target schools and perform outreach work, targeting over 1,000 pupils in schools. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of young people experimenting with illegal drugs;
- Supported the Crime Stoppers' Alcohol Campaign which was taken up by 3 out of 6 high schools. The scheme was a success, ensuring that 396 pupils heard the message, receiving positive publicity in the local press;
- Operated Ribble Valley on the Road bus, a mobile facility which is run by a combination of agencies; Youth and Community Service, Connexions, Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Unit and the Council. It targets schools and hot spots and delivers quality youth advice and counselling to areas where there is no provision. This facility is well used and can boast reaching over 1,000 young people in every 3 month period;
- Supported two very successful Pubwatch schemes operating in the borough, one for the Clitheroe area and the other for Longridge. The scheme is operated by Licensees and the Police, and targets individuals who cause trouble of a threatening nature in licensed premises or cause actual physical violence. Individuals who are guilty of an offence under the Pubwatch scheme receive a ban for a minimum of one month and a maximum of a lifetime, depending on the seriousness of the offence. Pubwatch has expanded to cover places such as Barrow, Whalley, Waddington, Chatburn, Chipping and Ribchester. Over the past 3 years 70 people have been banned and criminal offences in public houses have reduced dramatically;

CASE STUDY - COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT

This project is an excellent example of how joint working can successfully achieve a range of shared objectives. The idea came about from an enquiry from Ribblesdale Technology College for projects to engage pupils who found it difficult to fit in with normal curriculum activities and were therefore at risk of exclusion. The Council identified an old rose garden as an area within the Castle grounds that was in need of refurbishment.

Funding was secured through the County Council's Environmental Fund, Market Town Initiative and the Council to enable the complete re-development of the area.

A landscape architect was funded through the County Council's Community Enhancement programme to work with the students to design the new garden. Expertise and supervision was provided by Myerscough College, along with our Street Scene service. Students carried out the work, where possible, working alongside our own grounds maintenance staff, building up a relationship that will hopefully develop ownership of the project by the young people and provide a positive image of young people working in the Castle grounds.

The designs were high risk, producing modern solutions in a traditional setting. Any concerns were allayed when the garden was opened to wide community acclaim and, nearly two years on, the community are enjoying a much loved, vandal free facility.

- Provided annual Sporting Excellence Grants to assist young talented sportsmen and women, and Recreation/ Culture Grants to support local voluntary organisations;
- Provided a community-based CCTV system at Longridge, in partnership with the town council and community groups, to help reduce vandalism and anti-social behaviour;
- Introduced Leisure Cards offering subsidised membership of the Council's leisure facilities to disadvantaged groups, allowing socio/demographic analysis of take-up;
- Formed Primrose Action Group as a result of a disturbing rise in criminal damage to parked vehicles in the Primrose Ward of Clitheroe in 2004/05. The group consisted of local residents, Police and Council officers. The reaction to the problem involved a targeted response from the Police, use of both overt and covert patrols, raised awareness amongst residents, earlier reporting of incidents, leafleting of residents and a strong sense of "togetherness". By this combination of tactics, the volume of crimes decreased from a "high" of 30 per month in June 2004 to isolated incidents by August 2005;

CASE STUDY - MENTORING SCHEME

A one-to-one mentoring scheme has been developed to engage 'at risk' youngsters in a range of community projects. The Scheme involves working with disaffected pupils usually from years 8/9/10 at High School. So far we have engaged with 8 boys and 4 girls and the feedback from mentors, pupils and the school has been very positive. The scheme has resulted in a reduction in the amount of criminal damage, anti-social behaviour and juvenile nuisance incidents.

- Put in place the Longridge Dispersal Order, which came into force in October 2006 in response to residents' concerns about the gathering of large groups of youths who were intimidating the public and affecting local businesses. The Order resulted in reductions in criminal damage of nearly 50% and anti-social behaviour by 33%. The Order was extended by a further six months because of growing concerns of problem youths coming into Longridge from the Preston area. The scheme's success was recognised by the receipt of a POP (Problem Oriented Partnerships) Award in March 2007;

CASE STUDY - CLITHEROE SKATE PARK

Clitheroe Skate Park is one of the region's best outdoor parks, attracting young people not just from within the Ribble Valley, but also from neighbouring boroughs. It was opened in April 2006 within the Council-owned Clitheroe Castle Park, with funding from the Lancaster Foundation at a cost of about £250,000 and is operated through a lease arrangement by Oasis – a Christian based community development organisation. After some initial teething problems with anti-social behaviour and littering, the skate park has gone from strength to strength, with over 200 young people using the excellent facility during summer peak times. Skaters of the highest standard are attracted to the Skate Park from all over the country.

- Developed Ribble Valley Sports Club, an inter-agency venture run by the Council's Community Sports Facilitator. It targets young people in the 13–16 age group and operates every Friday evening, alternating between Clitheroe and Longridge. A range of sports are offered and attendance has been good with an average of 12 young people attending. This diversity initiative has helped reduce vandalism and petty crime by young people;
- Appointed an additional Environmental Health Officer (Health and Safety) to deal with smoke free enforcement, establishing an annual rolling programme to enforce new provisions of smoke free workplace legislation, and to address shortfalls in health and safety enforcement capacity;
- Established a formal Licensing Protocol with all enforcement agencies;

CASE STUDY - CLITHEROE CASTLE LABYRINTH

In 2005 the Council created a new Labyrinth in the grounds of Clitheroe Castle. The scheme is the first of its kind in Lancashire and comprises a unique, large-scale design in grass turf designed for walking with a friend or family member. The design was chosen after workshops were held with the artist and the Ribble Valley community. The project involved local primary schools, public talks, a lantern parade and a spectacular night projection event held in the darkened council chambers.

The Council has been supported by LAND,⁴⁵ Clitheroe the Future, Friends of Clitheroe Castle, the North West Development Agency and the East Lancashire Regional Park development and Environmental Arts Network (ELEAN).

- Had managerial expertise recognised by the secondment of our Community Development Manager to Sport England to assist in a major improvement project for the cultural sector;
- Developed an Event Safety Policy and Advisory Multi-Agency Group to process and deal with large licensing events/outdoor events;
- Formed a District Response Forum, a multi-agency group, which develops local response plans to deal with identified emergency situations recognised within the Community Risk register – such as flooding;
- Received a national Quality Award for Ribblesdale Pool – Quest accreditation. This is a rigorous external assessment process that measures the level of service across 20 management areas. The facility has been commended for its cleanliness where it scored higher in this category; (9 out of 10), than any other Quest centre in the North West region;
- Created a Health and Safety group, chaired by the Health and Safety Advisor, including a member champion and trade union representative, which meets 4 times a year to monitor and evaluate our performance in this important area;
- In 2006/07, spent just over £22,500 in supporting meals on wheels and luncheon clubs for elderly people throughout the Ribble Valley.

To Protect and Enhance the existing Environmental Quality of our area

We have:

- In partnership with Lancashire County Council, built the new Waste Transfer Station within the Council's depot on Salthill Industrial Estate in August 2006. As part of the project there were a number of improvements made to the depot, including an extension of the office block, which included new canteen and welfare facilities for staff, a training and meeting room and a ground

floor stores facility. Alterations to the vehicle workshop provided more internal secure storage and garaging and an under-chassis vehicle washing system was installed in the yard. The improvements have contributed to efficiencies within the refuse collection and recycling service, provided a better operational depot and an improved environment for all staff based there, plus the opportunity to relocate the Grounds Maintenance staff from the old facilities in the Castle Grounds to our main base of operation;

- Successfully introduced the first phase of an innovative three-stream waste collection system and we are on track for delivery of subsequent phases in 2007 and 2008;

CASE STUDY - THREE STREAM WASTE COLLECTION

Unlike our neighbouring authorities, the Council recognised at an early stage the importance of retaining a weekly collection of residual waste. By trialling prototype split-bodied vehicles and developing a hypothesis of alternating fortnightly collection of 2 recycling streams, we arrived at the point where we could test the hypothesis by offering a service based on 3x140 litre wheeled bins - one each for the 2 recycling streams and one for residual waste.

The trial round was introduced in spring 2006, and a survey of user satisfaction was carried out on the Council's behalf as a research project by Urban Mines - a subsidiary organisation of the University of Lancaster.

The survey was returned by 21% of the trial population (a 95% response rate of those that were surveyed) and the result was that 97% were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service and 73% rating it better than before.

Since then, arrangements have been made to roll out the service to the rest of the borough in 2 stages by the end of 2008.

- Found that 77% of respondents to the BVGHSS think the Council is working to make the area cleaner and greener and this is top quartile performance;
- Improved the standard of cleanliness of the town centres of Clitheroe and Longridge and reduced the levels of complaints to virtually nil;
- Increased the frequency of litter bin emptying by 5% to reduce the amount of spillage from bins;
- Been awarded the Green Apple Award for Slaidburn and Ribchester toilets, where the Council has spent £116,000 to improve the public conveniences. As the conveniences are located in a rural area and receive a large number of visitors, it was agreed that the conveniences be rebuilt in a style in keeping with the local area. Stone was reclaimed from a demolished church and the roof tiles were painted with

manure to speed the ageing and the appearance of the slates. Internally the convenience features water saving sanitary fittings throughout and other energy saving fixtures;

- Provided additional dog waste bins (increased by 33%) and extended our dog warden services, following consultation with our Parish and Town Councils, to reduce dog fouling;
- Worked with Community Support Officers to "police" the area and hand out Fixed Penalty Notices for dog fouling and littering to offenders. This joint approach has resulted in an increase in the number of trained and authorised officers, and a doubling in the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued and a reduction in complaints;
- Created a Commemorative Arboretum at Clitheroe Cemetery, which extends the range of burial options available to residents;
- According to our Best Value Planning Applicants survey, 81% of respondents satisfied with our Planning service. This is in the top quartile;
- As part of the Lancashire Waste Partnership won the Best Waste Minimisation Project of the Year at the national recycling awards in 2004;
- In 2006/07, made £100,00 available through the Medium Term Financial Strategy to Longridge Town Council and all groups active in the Longridge area. The renovation of the old station building attracted a grant of £90,000. This scheme will provide the catalyst for further regeneration in the town. The remaining grant aid was awarded to 5 Longridge organisations.

To Match the Supply of Homes in our area with the Identified Housing Need

We have:

- Worked in partnership with the Local Strategic Partnership, a local charitable trust and a registered social landlord to establish the first Community Land Trust in the North West in the village of Chipping. The trust was established in 2007 to build 11 affordable dwellings for local people in housing need, in the centre of the village. This innovative project was recently cited in the Government Green Paper on Housing and a guide on how to establish Community Land Trusts has been produced. It is to be used as additional resource material to the Housing Corporation's Toolkit;
- Recently granted planning permission for a new housing estate of 45 affordable homes, using a variety of tenures, in the village of Langho. We have also granted planning permission for 16 apartments for shared ownership on a former coal yard site in Mitchell Street, Clitheroe;
- Successfully worked in partnership with several registered social landlords during the past 3 years to provide 62 new affordable homes and bring 20 empty homes back into use;
- Negotiated with a registered social landlord to convert Beacon Villas, Longridge, into 5 apartments for rent to local people in housing need;

- Worked in partnership with Space Housing Association since early 2006 to assist first time buyers using a 'home-buy' scheme, which offered an interest free loan of up to a maximum of 25% of the value of the home to be purchased. We assisted 4 first time buyers in 2006. In 2007 we have assisted 10 first time buyers to acquire a home using the national home-buy scheme - 'Plumlife';
- Worked in partnership with Regenda Housing Association to provide owners with loans to finance repairs and improvements to their homes. The loans are restricted to smaller 'affordable' houses and allow home owners to release equity in their home with repayment being made when the property is sold. This scheme has replaced a previous house renovation scheme and was introduced in April 2007. The first 6 months has resulted in 6 homes being repaired and improved;

CASE STUDY - AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In 2006 the Council sold its former refuse collection depot to St Vincents Housing Association following a tendering process to provide affordable homes on this brownfield site adjacent to the town centre of Clitheroe. A 'mixed' housing scheme which provides 14 apartments for rent to people over the age of 55, 5 houses and 2 bungalows for shared ownership and a 4 bedroom bungalow for people with profound physical and learning disabilities has been built on the site.

- Been highly successful in the Housing Corporation bidding round for 2008/11. The submitted bids amounted to an overall investment in affordable housing of £6.5m in Ribble Valley, which will provide 84 affordable homes. This potentially huge investment is as a result of partnership working with housing associations and our housing and planning joint protocol for delivery of affordable housing. The protocol provides developers with a clear procedure for securing planning permission;
- Made landlord/tenant grants available to assist landlords to renovate affordable rented properties. The grant is 50% of the cost of renovation. The Council receives tenancy nomination rights and sets an affordable rent for 5 years. 35 privately rented homes have been improved using this scheme during the past 3 years;
- Introduced an Empty Property Strategy in 2004. Our annual target of bringing 12 empty properties back into use has been exceeded for the past 2 years;
- Reviewed and updated our Housing Strategy and carried out a successful Housing Options Appraisal in 2006/07 both of which were considered fit for purpose by the GONW;
- Reviewed and updated our Homelessness Strategy. In partnership with Adactus Housing Association we have improved homeless accommodation in Longridge in 2007 and carried out significant improvements to the Joiners

Arms homeless units in Clitheroe. We do not use bed and breakfast accommodation to house homeless people;

- Reduced the length of stay for homeless people in our hostel accommodation. In 2004/2005 the average length of stay was 13.78 weeks, in 2006/07 this was reduced to 8.85 weeks. This improvement was partly due to the introduction of a tenancy protection scheme in 2005 which has assisted 45 households to be granted tenancies in the private housing sector. The Council guarantee a bond and deposit to the private landlord to help provide these tenancies;

CASE STUDY - HOMELESSNESS

The prevention of homelessness is the main focus for staff dealing with this problem. An increase in young people becoming homeless in 2006 prompted us to deliver a youth homeless education programme. This was delivered by a theatre company illustrating the problems of homelessness to 15 and 16 year olds students in all secondary schools in the Ribble Valley in April 2007. The feedback from the young people was excellent and youth homelessness has now reduced significantly.

*"Excellent – Thank you Ribble Valley, very thought provoking presentation, students clearly see the dangers facing homeless."*⁴⁶
Year 10 Teacher

- In the past 3 years:
 - Paid over £480k in grant aid to adapt 106 private dwellings to meet the specific needs of disabled occupiers
 - Paid over £910k in grant aid to renovate 108 privately owned dwellings
 - Spent nearly £3.1m on improvements to Council owned dwellings
- Worked in partnership with social services to deliver extra care to tenants in St Annes Court elderly persons sheltered housing scheme in Clitheroe. A dedicated team providing 24 hour care enables tenants to remain in their own home – providing a real alternative to moving to a nursing home;
- Agreed to transfer our Housing stock to 'Vicinity', an existing Registered Social Landlord. This transfer will be completed in April 2008, following a successful tenants' ballot in Autumn 2007.