

# Shaping our District

West Berkshire  
Council Strategy

Working together to make West Berkshire an even greater place in which to live, work and learn

2015-2019



West Berkshire  
COUNCIL

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*“Working together  
to make West  
Berkshire an even  
greater place in  
which to live,  
work and learn”*

# Foreword

*to adapt to the  
changing world  
we now live in*

“Despite our successes there is no room for complacency and many challenges remain.”

Looking back over the four years since our last Council Strategy was published, it is clear that despite the many economic and financial challenges that we have had to face, the council has continued to deliver on the tasks that it set itself.

Despite our successes, there is no room for complacency and many challenges remain. There is a need for more housing, in particular affordable housing. Educational attainment should be better and the gap between the best and worst performing pupils remains too wide. We need to strive for a more highly skilled workforce and to make sure that our strong economic performance is sustained by a modern and effective infrastructure. Demographic changes will bring further challenges and highlight the need for the council to do more to support vulnerable people in its communities.

All this needs to be considered alongside the ongoing financial constraints. There will be further reductions in council spending over the period of our Strategy and these will need to be accommodated alongside new legal duties; perhaps the most significant being the Care Act.

Over the last 24 months or so it is clear that the national and the local economy has begun to recover. One of our aims will be to continue to support this growth recognising that we will need to achieve this with very limited, and often reducing, resources. We will also need to ensure that we continue to build and develop the partnerships we have successfully established since 1998. We recognise that we cannot realise this vision alone.

We also need to be realistic. Success will be dependent on focusing our resources where they are most needed and where they can bring greatest benefit to our communities. We recognise that we will not succeed if we, as a council, do not change. Going forward we will need to do things differently. As an organisation we need to continue to become more efficient and effective, but at the same time the way in which we work with, and support, our local communities needs to adapt to the changing world we now live in.

The council will continue to deliver hundreds of core/essential services including protecting the environment, waste management, trading standards, environmental health, licensing, elections, land charges, countryside and improving public health. The purpose of this strategy is not to detail all of them but to focus on areas where we need and want to improve. The broader range of services provided by the council are included in other strategic or operational plans such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The new Council Strategy is intended to clarify what we aim to improve over the next four years and to highlight how we intend to achieve these improvements.



**Gordon Lundie**  
Leader of the Council



**Nick Carter**  
Chief Executive

# Summary

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## Our Vision:

*“Working together to make West Berkshire an even greater place in which to live, work and learn”*



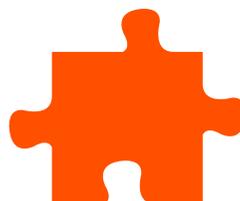
### Our Place

Over the next four years West Berkshire as a district will continue to grow and that growth will be at its highest for those aged under 18 and over 65. The impact of the Care Act will increase the number of older and vulnerable adults we will need to provide care for.

We have a strong local economy with high levels of employment but we cannot afford to be complacent. West Berkshire needs to remain an attractive place to do business, so continued investment in our infrastructure is vital. We also need to continue to ensure that our local workforce has the appropriate skills.

We will need more housing, in particular affordable housing, whilst at the same time protecting the natural environment that makes West Berkshire such a good place to live.

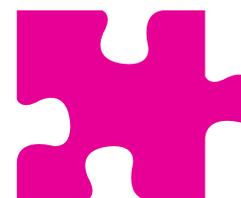
Our communities are well educated and we have good schools but attainment could be better. We need to be more ambitious for our young people.



### Our Strategic Aims

**We have set four strategic aims to support our vision:**

- A.** Better educated communities.
- B.** A stronger local economy.
- C.** Protect and support those who need it.
- D.** Maintain a high quality of life within our communities.



### Our Priorities for Improvement

**We have identified six key priorities for improvement**

1. Improve educational attainment.
2. Close the educational attainment gap.
3. Enable the completion of more affordable housing.
4. Deliver or enable key infrastructure improvements in relation to roads, rail, flood prevention, regeneration and the digital economy.
5. Good at safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.
6. Support communities to do more for themselves.



### Our Approach - A More Effective Council

As an organisation we have been told, and we know, that we have many strengths. Those strengths alone however will not see us through the coming four years because of the financial constraints. As we reshape

West Berkshire we also need to reshape ourselves. In particular, we need to:

- encourage communities to do more for themselves recognising the council will have to withdraw from directly supporting some areas of activity where others can be more effective;
- find new ways of commissioning and delivering services;
- learn more from others;
- celebrate our achievements more effectively;
- develop a more modern and flexible workforce.



### Our Track Record

We published our last Council Strategy in 2011. Despite major financial challenges, we have achieved a great deal over the last four years, including:

- helped to significantly improve SAT and GCSE results;
- 97% of the principal road network is now in good condition;
- helped reduce domestic burglaries by 28%;
- recycling rates increased from 42% to 49%;
- completion of a new West Berkshire Museum;
- over 9000 homes have been enabled for superfast broadband.

# Our Achievements so far

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Since 2011 we have:



- Improved the educational achievement of our disadvantaged pupils.
- Invested over £70M in our school buildings.
- Reached the top 25% of councils in England for 11 and 16 year old attainment.
- Increased the number of young people starting an Apprenticeship.
- Significantly increased the number of primary school places.



- Increased the number of empty properties that could be lived in.
- Helped reduce domestic burglaries.
- 1.7 million visits to culture and leisure facilities and activities supported by the council.
- 9000 homes enabled for superfast broadband.



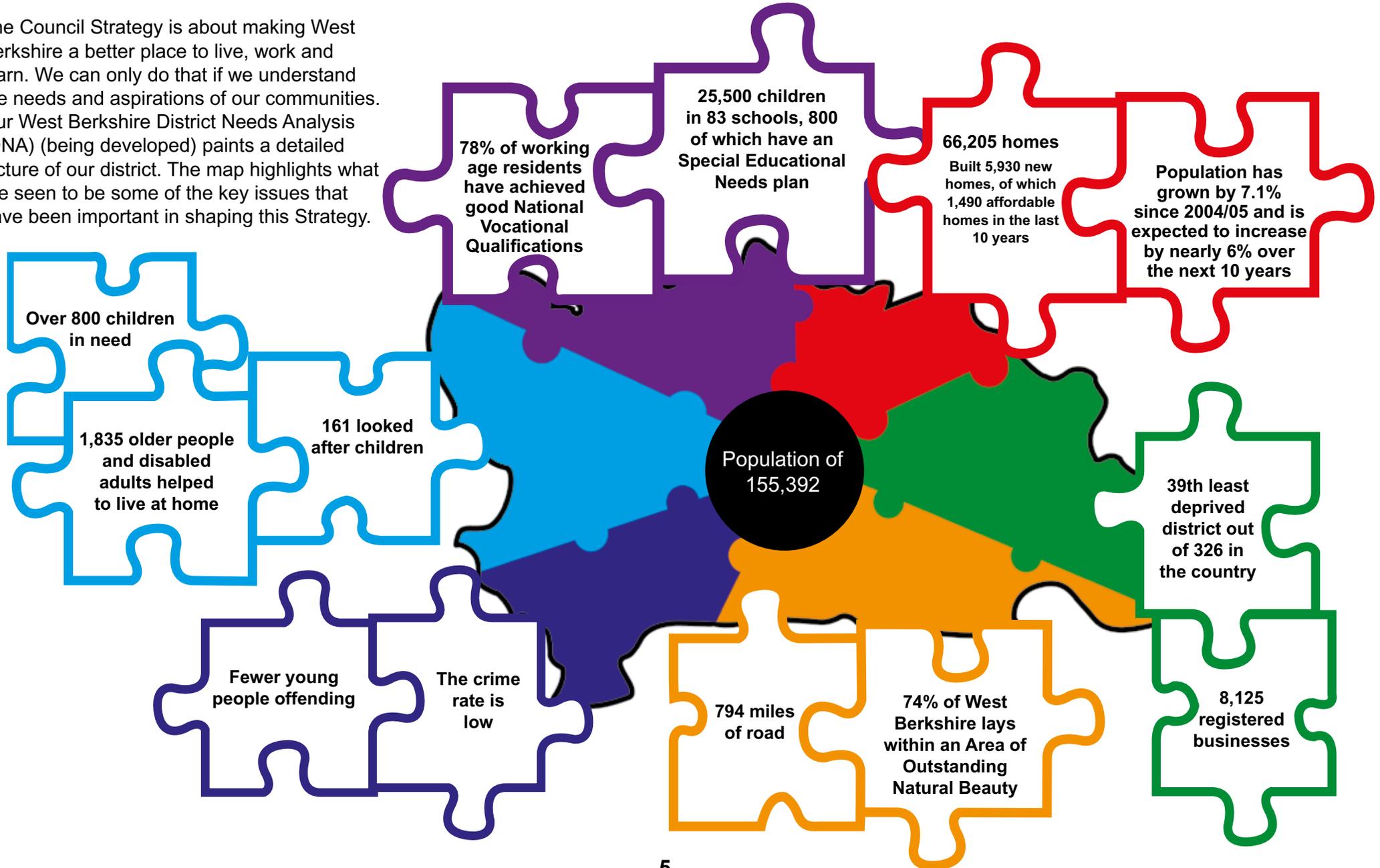
- Established a new 'early help' service for families and made it easier to access advice for safeguarding children cases.
- Better working with partner organisations to stop children being sexually exploited and to address cases of children who have gone missing.
- More vulnerable adults and families with disabled children have control of their support money.
- More children in care go on to higher education.
- More vulnerable children live with their relatives rather than placed with other carers.
- Enabled the provision of two extra-care sheltered housing schemes.
- Use of our discretionary housing payment fund to support people affected by welfare reform.



- Increased the district's recycling rate.
- Opened a new recycling centre at Padworth.
- Partnered with Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust to enhance our countryside sites.
- Invested £4m in flood alleviation schemes to protect homes.
- Adopted a Core Strategy setting the framework for development to 2026.
- Opened the new West Berkshire Museum.

# West Berkshire – The Place and its People

The Council Strategy is about making West Berkshire a better place to live, work and learn. We can only do that if we understand the needs and aspirations of our communities. Our West Berkshire District Needs Analysis (DNA) (being developed) paints a detailed picture of our district. The map highlights what are seen to be some of the key issues that have been important in shaping this Strategy.



# Our Vision, Aims and Priorities for Improvement

**Vision** Working together to make West Berkshire an even greater place to live, work and learn

## Aims



## Priorities for Improvement



The council provides a range of core services which it believes are essential for the communities of West Berkshire. These include:

- Protecting our children
- Maintaining our roads
- Collecting your bins and keeping the streets clean
- Providing benefits
- Collecting council tax and business rates
- Ensuring the wellbeing of older people and vulnerable adults
- Planning and Housing

Given the scale of the financial challenges that lie ahead it is impossible to guarantee that these services will be immune from cuts. We will however, seek to ensure that these services are delivered to a standard that is good for those who receive them.

# Aim A Better Educated Communities

## Why is this important?

We recognise that children and young people are integral to the future of the area and we have a responsibility to ensure that all of them are given the best possible opportunity to succeed and to enjoy growing up in a safe, secure, healthy and economically prosperous environment.

For an area as affluent as West Berkshire, our educational attainment should be much better and we have made this our priority.

We continue to work positively with all local academies and schools for the benefit of pupils across West Berkshire.



## Our priorities for improvement 2015-2019

- Raise the attainment of all our children at every key stage – *specifically we are aiming to be in the top 10% of councils for every key stage by 2019.*
- Close the attainment gap for vulnerable pupils – *we are aiming to eliminate the current attainment gap between disadvantaged children and other children.*



## Key things we will do

- Continue to develop our work with schools to improve outcomes for all children and young people.
- Invest £70m in our schools.
- Implement a West Berkshire School Improvement Strategy.
- Increase safety, health and wellbeing support for children and young people in schools.
- Ensure a good start for every child.
- Develop outstanding leaders and governors in our schools.

## How will we know we have succeeded?

- Nationally published pupil attainment data will show improvements across a range of areas.
- Completion of a number of school building projects including:
  - *Little Heath School*
  - *John Rankin Infant and Junior Schools*
  - *Kennet Valley Primary School*
- Annual evaluation of the effectiveness of the education service will show improvement.
- Our disadvantaged children will have better results and will be closer to the results of other children.

# Aim B A Stronger Local Economy

## Why is this important?

Having a good job, with a living wage and the resources to pay for the things you need is an essential requirement for a good quality of life, and improves wellbeing and sound health.

West Berkshire has traditionally had a healthy local economy and has now emerged strongly through the recent economic recession. The council has an important role in helping to create the conditions for private sector businesses to prosper and grow. Infrastructure, regeneration and ensuring that our workforce has the appropriate skills will be our focus areas over the coming four years.



## Our priorities for improvement 2015-2019

- Enable the completion of more affordable housing – *we are setting an ambitious target of facilitating the completion of 1000 new affordable homes across the district over the coming five years.*
- Deliver or enable key infrastructure projects in relation to roads, rail, flood prevention, regeneration and the digital economy:
  - *In relation to roads, our target is to be in the top 25% of councils nationally by 2019 for the condition of our main roads.*
  - *For rail, we will lobby for the extension of electrification from Newbury to Bedwyn.*
  - *We will implement a five year flood prevention programme through local flood forums and with the support of local communities.*
  - *We will take forward the regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate, Newbury Wharf and Market Street sites in Newbury and support the regeneration of Thatcham Town Centre.*
  - *We will ensure that all of West Berkshire has access to broadband this year with 95% of households having access to superfast broadband and all have access to faster broadband by 2017.*

## Key things we will do

- Investigate new ways of delivering affordable housing.
- Invest £17m in our roads.
- Seek to develop new partnerships with the private sector and local communities to enhance local infrastructure.
- Keep our Community Infrastructure Levy policy under review.
- Invest £5.2m in flood prevention schemes.
- Support and develop Flood Forums.
- Implement the Superfast Broadband Programme for Berkshire and West Berkshire.
- Lobby the government for rail electrification to Bedwyn.



## How will we know we have succeeded?

- We will publish the number of new affordable homes built on a quarterly basis.
- Benchmarking our highway maintenance performance with others using nationally published indicators will show improved results.
- Our agreed five year plan will have been implemented in accordance with the programme agreed with local flood forums.
- Newbury regeneration projects will have started on site by 2019 with clear plans in place for Thatcham by the same date.
- 95% of households will be able to access superfast broadband by 2017 and 100% will have faster broadband.
- We will have secured rail electrification to Bedwyn as early as possible within Network Rail's future programme.

## Aim C Protect and Support Those Who Need it

### Why is this important?

Supporting the vulnerable, whether they are older people, adults with disabilities or children is at the heart of what the council is about. The council has very clear legal duties to support vulnerable people and it is where the majority of its resources are spent. It carries out these duties by working with partners through the Local Children's Safeguarding Board and Safeguarding Adults Board.

The new Care Act will be implemented during the life of this strategy which is also likely to result in more people being cared for by the council. Population pressures and other factors will also increase the demand for social care in future years. We see safeguarding the most vulnerable in our communities as the most important thing we do and we have therefore maintained this as a priority.

The personalisation of social care and safeguarding adults empowers people to speak out, make informed decisions with support if necessary so that members of our communities can help each other.

### Our priorities for improvement 2015-2019

- Good at safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.



## Key things we will do

- Ensure that it is easy for local people to refer their safeguarding concerns to us.
- We will make sure that our limited resources are focused on the agreed priorities of the Local Children's Safeguarding Board and Safeguarding Adults Board.
- Ensure that the council's services dealing with initial enquiries regarding vulnerable children and adults are adequately resourced.
- Work in partnership with health, education, Police and voluntary and community sector organisations to improve safeguarding.
- Improve the retention of good quality social workers through the establishment of a Social Worker Academy.
- Implement an effective quality assurance programme for safeguarding services.
- Improve our current training programme.

## How will we know we have succeeded?

- Where services are independently inspected they are rated at least good and peer reviews of safeguarding rated highly.
- We will see a reduction in the number of looked after children and children on a child protection plan.
- We will see an increase in the number of people that are helped to remain living at home after a period of enablement.



## Aim D

Maintain a high quality of life within our communities

### Why is this important?

The council has four underlying principles which guide how it works;

- (i). **Helping you to help yourself**
- (ii). **Helping you to help one another**
- (iii). **Helping you when you cannot help yourself**
- (iv). **Promoting and acting in the interests of our local community**

The council recognises that many people see themselves more as part of their immediate local area rather than as part of an administrative area called West Berkshire. As a result our focus has always been on working closely with local communities and parish councils, recognising that local people know what is best for their own community. We will also continue to work closely with communities of interest such as carers, voluntary groups etc.

We intend to do more work in this area over the coming four years, not only because limited resources mean the council will be able to do less itself, but also because it is vital that we continue to unlock the potential resources that reside within our communities and identify the most effective way of delivering services.

### Our priorities for improvement 2015-2019

- Support communities to do more to help themselves



## Key things we will do

- Accelerate the delivery of local services for local communities by local communities.
- Work with local people to develop and improve our community planning programme.
- Provide additional resources to work with communities to enhance volunteering activities.
- Implement new ways of working to develop communities to be more resilient in meeting the needs of vulnerable people.
- Ensure the continuation of access to libraries across the district and opportunities to participate in leisure activities.
- Develop opportunities to engage with West Berkshire's heritage.
- Work with local communities to help people live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives and improve the health of the poorest fastest.



## How will we know we have succeeded?

- We will have successfully transferred services/ assets to local communities where the desire exists.
- Our communities will be more 'self sufficient' and less dependent on the council and wider 'State' for support.
- We will ask our communities if they have appropriate plans in place to support their local area.
- More communities will refresh their community plans.
- We will see that the physical and virtual use of the library service and participation in sport and activity programmes at our leisure centres is maintained.
- We will maintain a programme of outreach activities promoting learning about the heritage of West Berkshire.
- Our least affluent communities and vulnerable groups will be as healthy as those with the best health and wellbeing in West Berkshire.
- We will improve the health and wellbeing of all children and young people aged 0-19 through the delivery of an effective Health Visiting and School Nursing service.

# Our Approach & Our Values - Become an Even More Effective Council

## Why is this important?

The council is expecting to continue to see its government funding fall over the life of this strategy. The council will need to save around £5-6m every year in order to balance its books. Such a level of savings cannot be found by further trimming of existing services. A more radical reshaping of the council is now required. This needs to be driven by a review of what the council has and wishes to do itself and a consideration of what might be best done by others, or possibly not done at all.

A review of the council was recently completed by the Local Government Association. This highlighted a number of the council's strengths but also a number of areas where we could be more efficient with the processes we operate, be a bit more innovative and work with the public and our partners in a more open and transparent way. Alongside our ongoing financial challenges these areas of improvement will be where we will focus our efforts internally to enhance our effectiveness over the coming four years.

## Our Values

We recognise that how we do things is as important as what we do. We have therefore established four values which reflect the culture we are seeking to create in the council.

These values are:

- **Respect**
- **Integrity**
- **Ambition**
- **Responsibility**

## Our priorities for improvement 2015-2019

- Become an even more effective council



## Key things we will do

- Continue to deliver our core services to the agreed standard.
- Retain and build on our strengths.
- Reshape what we do and how we do it so that we can continue to live within our means.
- Improve our partnership working especially with Health.
- Senior management will spend more time on strategic rather than operational issues.
- Encourage more flexibility and innovation amongst our staff and foster ideas from the 'grass roots'.
- Strengthen our leadership capability.
- Develop a modern and flexible workforce where staff are recognised and valued.
- Get better at celebrating our successes and explaining our failures.
- Make greater use of other appropriate information to help assess the cost and effectiveness of what we do.

## How will we know we have succeeded?

- Our local communities will tell us if we are becoming more effective when we ask them.
- Benchmark ourselves against similar councils to ensure we compare favourably with them.
- Ask the Local Government Association to conduct a biennial review so that we have an independent assessment of how successful we are being.
- Ask our staff how we are doing.

