

West Lothian Council

The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning

Prepared for the Accounts Commission

June 2005



Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000 under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. Together they ensure that the Scottish Executive and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.



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Commission findings

1. The Commission accepts this report on the performance of West Lothian Council's statutory duty to secure Best Value and to initiate and facilitate the Community Planning process. The Commission recognises that the report gives a broad picture of the Council's performance based on the work of Audit Scotland and the findings of other scrutiny bodies such as Inspectorates and that it does not attempt a comprehensive review of all service delivery. We acknowledge the co-operation and assistance given to the audit process by members and officers of the Council.

2. The Commission recognises the evidence in this report of good practice and a strong commitment to improvement in this council. West Lothian has faced a number of adverse demographic and economic circumstances but the Council has shown itself to be effective in responding to change in its environment. The particular aspects of West Lothian Council which the Commission welcomes include –
 - It has a clear and ambitious strategic vision for its area and through effective business planning this is transmitted into successful service delivery;
 - It has a positive organisational culture that is firmly focused on improving services for the people who use them;
 - It has an open culture and places great value on the contribution of its staff in improving services
 - It learns from good practice both internally and externally and applies it across the range of council activities, for example through the West Lothian Assessment Model which was developed from the housing service.

3. The Council understands that Best Value is about a continuous drive for improvement and has set out an agenda for this purpose. The Commission will be particularly interested to see improvement in these areas –
 - Development of the role elected members should play in scrutinising service performance;
 - Better performance information to underpin management and scrutiny processes
 - Year on year targets
 - More balanced public performance reporting that highlights areas in need of improvement as well as the council's successes.



4. The Commission looks forward to receiving by 30 September 2005, an Improvement Plan from West Lothian Council that responds to the audit report and these Findings. In view of the positive nature of the report, the Commission does not expect that a further comprehensive Best Value audit will be required in West Lothian Council for a period of four years.



The Audit of Best Value

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced new statutory duties relating to Best Value and Community Planning.

The scope of Best Value and Community Planning is very broad but in general terms a successful council will:

- work with its partners to identify a clear set of priorities that respond to the needs of the community in both the short and the longer term
- be organised to deliver those priorities
- meet and clearly demonstrate that it is meeting the community's needs
- operate in a way that drives continuous improvement in all its activities.

The challenge for local government is to find new ways of working across services and with other bodies to achieve the best results for citizens and service users. The key objectives of this audit were to:

- assess the extent to which West Lothian Council is meeting its duties under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, and
- agree planned improvements with the council. These will be reviewed by the council's external auditor over the next three years.

As Best Value and Community Planning encompass all the activities of a council it is not realistic to audit everything in depth, so we plan our detailed work in two ways:

- where possible, we draw on the findings of other scrutiny processes, such as the work carried out by the council's external auditors and by inspectorates. These are incorporated into our report
- we select certain aspects of the council's performance for detailed audit investigation. A wide range of sources, including the council's own assessment of its performance, reports issued by external audit and inspections, and national Statutory Performance Indicators, informs this selection.

The report reflects this selective approach, with detailed commentary on some areas and limited or no coverage in others. We have made some comparisons with other councils, but our overall approach has focused on performance trends and improvement within West Lothian Council. The report also reflects the picture available at the time our main audit work was conducted between February and March 2005.

We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided to the audit team by Councillor Graeme Morrice (Leader of the Council), Alex Linkston (Chief Executive), Jim McIvor (Best Value Manager) and all other members and officers contacted during the audit.



Overall Conclusions

West Lothian Council demonstrates a clear commitment to Best Value and Community Planning. It is characterised by very effective leadership and a strong culture of continuous improvement that is well embedded throughout the organisation. Focused on the needs of its communities, the council has a track record of delivering modern, integrated services through good partnership working. It is creative in designing services around the needs of users. Where the need for improvement is identified, action is taken quickly.

Significant advances have been made in developing a comprehensive performance management system. Better information on costs and quality will enable the council to demonstrate continuous improvement in services more effectively.

Strategic direction

1. West Lothian Council's organisational culture is a major reason for its success. It has strong and effective political leadership, setting clear political priorities and organisational values. These provide a clear framework for everything the council does. The council's ambition is clearly expressed in its mission statement – *'Striving for excellence...working with and for our communities'*. But more importantly, this ambition is demonstrated by the way it delivers good, user focused services, and by its positive organisational culture, focused on service improvement. A clear planning hierarchy means that priorities cascade down from the overarching community plan, through corporate and service plans, to individual staff work plans. This clarity of focus contributes to the council being able to deliver successfully on its key objectives.
2. The council's structure also effectively supports delivery of its key objectives. Committees are organised around the main community and corporate plan themes. The management team is led by a strong and effective Chief Executive. The management structure is designed to ensure that issues are viewed corporately, maintaining a focus on the experience of service users whose needs frequently cross departmental and service boundaries. Relationships between members and officers are characterised by mutual respect and trust.
3. The council is open and transparent and makes a wide range of information about services and performance available. In common with other councils it needs to do more to present a balanced view of performance, explaining poorer performance as well as it highlights its achievements. The inclusion of measurable targets in the corporate plan to report progress against would improve accountability.



Continuous improvement

4. The council harnesses its resources to meet its priorities. It values the contribution of staff to delivering high quality services and is expanding its staff development programme. It has recently introduced a more strategic corporate approach to workforce planning through its 'People Strategy'.
5. Financial management is strong and budgets are clearly linked to priorities. The council uses information and communication technology well to improve access to services and make them easier to use. E-procurement is being introduced across the council and it is aware that the efficiency savings arising from this need to be systematically identified and reallocated to front line services. The council is preparing a procurement policy. This should be progressed to ensure that its approach to procurement is aligned with its overall objectives, supports effective service delivery and provides value for money.
6. The council is at an advanced stage in developing a comprehensive system for ensuring continuous improvement – the West Lothian Assessment Model. In taking this forward the council will focus on developing the 'results' section of the model, requiring services to demonstrate quality and cost effectiveness. The council recognises that key performance indicators need to be further developed to demonstrate this.
7. Elected members need to develop their scrutiny role, and would benefit from external support for this. While some scrutiny occurs in forums outwith the formal committee structure, increased scrutiny by committees would improve transparency and public accountability. The production of more consistent information about performance across all services will assist effective scrutiny. The council recognises that performance information needs to be reported more systematically to the corporate management team and to members, and has plans to address this.
8. The council has a culture that encourages staff to challenge the way things are done, focusing on making services better for the people who use them. This has contributed to its success in reconfiguring services around the needs of users. Its West Lothian Assessment Model is proving to be a useful tool in embedding continuous improvement within services. The council measures its performance against leading organisations and looks for examples of best practice both within and beyond the public sector.

Meeting its strategic aims

9. The council maintains a clear focus on its strategic aims and is delivering many improvements for local residents.



- Joint working is a particular strength and has resulted in easier access across a range of related services provided by other public bodies, such as the NHS and government agencies.
- The council is strongly focused on improving the experience of people using services. It consults widely with its communities and there are good examples of services being redesigned in response to findings from consultation.
- The council is using information and communications technology very well to deliver e-government, making services more accessible to users.
- Providing equality of opportunity is a corporate value and there are good examples of the impact this has had on the way services are delivered.
- There are many examples of how the council is effectively addressing issues of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Service performance

10. Although performance management information needs to be developed further, there is evidence of good performance across a range of services:
 - HMIE reported very positively on the quality of the Education Service and attainment and achievement levels are improving.
 - Social Work is working well to support the council's objective of enabling people who need care to live at home or in their local community. It has adopted an innovative approach to using technology to support people to live independently. The service performs well on a number of Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs).
 - The Housing Service has a strong performance culture and is well-managed. Performance against SPIs is good. Performance on the time taken to re-let empty houses, and the resulting loss of rent, is better than any other Scottish council.
 - There is evidence of good performance in Operational Services, including Building, Roads and Waste Management. The council has the lowest percentage of its roads network in need of maintenance of all Scottish councils.
 - Economic Development has been successful in the face of large scale closures of manufacturing business and resultant job losses. The economic development service has contributed to this success by working well with partner agencies and local businesses to provide support and encourage entrepreneurs.



What needs to improve?

11. The council has identified the areas it needs to improve and is taking steps to address them. By continuing to develop its performance management system it will ensure that it is able to provide a more complete view of how individual services are performing. Better information on the cost and quality of services will enable it to demonstrate the impact of its approach to Best Value in improving services for the people who use them. The council needs to ensure that performance information is clear and of a consistent standard to allow members to exercise their public scrutiny function more effectively. Members need to develop this scrutiny role. The improvement agenda for West Lothian Council is detailed on page 50 of this report.



Part 1: Does the council have clear strategic direction?

West Lothian Council is clearly focused on delivering high quality, accessible services. It has been successful in delivering on many areas of the improvement and modernising agenda. Major factors in this success are its organisational culture and its clear focus on priorities. The council has strong political leadership and members are highly engaged in setting policy, and in driving the policy agenda forward. A clear planning hierarchy ensures that a strong focus on corporate objectives is maintained throughout the council.

Context

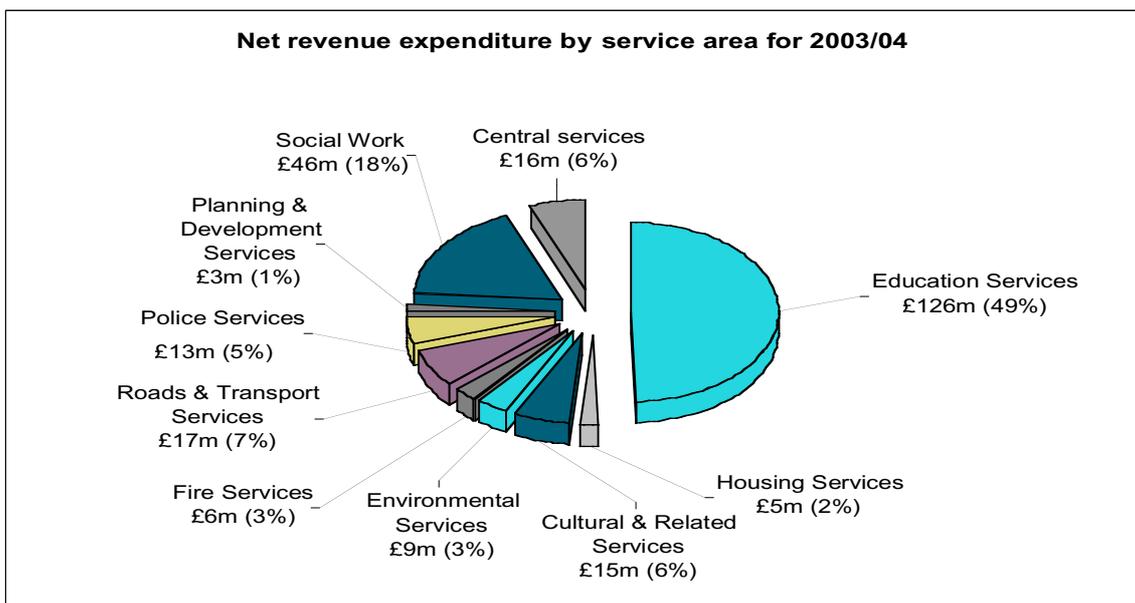
12. West Lothian is a medium sized local authority. It covers 165 square miles, of which two thirds are mainly agricultural and one tenth is urban development. The main centres of population are Livingston, Bathgate and Linlithgow.
13. West Lothian's population is currently around 161,000 and growing at the fastest rate in Scotland, with a predicted 11% rise over the next 15 years compared to a decline of 1.5% for Scotland as a whole. Following the national trend, the number of older people will increase, and the rise in West Lothian will be one of the highest in Scotland. However, in contrast to the national trend, the number of young people (0-16 years) is also expected to grow.
14. The council recognises the need to address the main challenges arising from the growth in population:
 - New housing will be required to meet the population increase, and the growth in single person households (projected to increase by 44% against a Scottish average of 28%). After local consultation the council has approved planned housing developments to provide 12,000 new houses to help meet this need.
 - More children and young people will put pressure on education services. The council is taking a very active approach and is working with developers to accommodate growth in a way which will minimise the impact on existing communities and the council's resources. The council is negotiating a significant level of 'planning gain' to support the development of a number of new schools.
 - The growth in the number of older people will increase demand for social services and the council is planning its future workforce and shaping services to meet future demands.



- The impact on the physical and social environment will have to be managed to ensure sustainable development and the council routinely considers the sustainability of development proposals.
15. Although average earnings are 1% below the national average, unemployment is relatively low at 2.4% compared to the Scottish average of 3.0%. Similarly, the proportion of people living in households in receipt of benefits (13.8%) is also below the Scottish average (15.0%).
 16. West Lothian's economy has undergone significant change, moving from reliance on traditional manufacturing to becoming a centre for research and development, and high technology manufacturing businesses. Although there have been major job losses in electronics manufacturing in recent years, this has been offset by growth in the retail and service sectors. The council and its economic development partners are working to diversify the local economy and encourage home grown businesses to make the area less dependent on inward investment.
 17. The council currently has a Labour majority with 18 out of 32 elected members. There are 11 SNP, 1 Conservative and 2 Independent members.
 18. In 2003/04 the council's revenue expenditure was £256 million. Band D council tax for 2003/04 was £984, which is slightly below the Scottish average. Net expenditure per person is approximately £1580, which means West Lothian is the 5th lowest spender among Scottish councils. The share of the revenue budget spent on each service is shown in [Exhibit 1](#).

Exhibit 1

The council spent £256 million on providing services in 2003/04



Source: West Lothian Council Audited Accounts 2003/04



Vision

West Lothian Council has a clear and ambitious strategic vision for the area as a thriving, modern, attractive community; and for the council as a centre of excellence in modern service delivery and public management.

19. The strength of the council's ambition is reflected in its mission statement: '*Striving for excellence ...working with and for our communities*'. While it is not uncommon for councils to have aspirational mission statements, West Lothian is very effective in driving its vision through into the way it delivers user focused services, and into its positive organisational culture.
20. The vision for the area was developed jointly with community planning partners. The council engaged with a range of groups in drawing up the community and corporate plans and, as a result, they reflect the needs and aspirations of local communities. The plans recognise the economic and demographic context of the area.
21. The council's values and principles, as set out in its corporate plan ([Exhibit 2](#)), are embedded in its organisational culture and provide a clear framework for everything it does.

Exhibit 2

The council has a clear set of values and guiding principles

The council's values:

- Focusing on our customers' needs
- Being honest, open and accountable
- Providing equality of opportunities
- Developing employees
- Making best use of resources
- Working in partnership

Its guiding principles:

- A **corporate** council...focused on priorities
- A **connected** council...at the heart of a network of partners
- A **customer** focused council...organised around the needs of the citizen
- An **adaptive** council...operating in a responsive positive culture
- A **best value** council...delivering high quality integrated services
- An **e-council**...enabled by technology

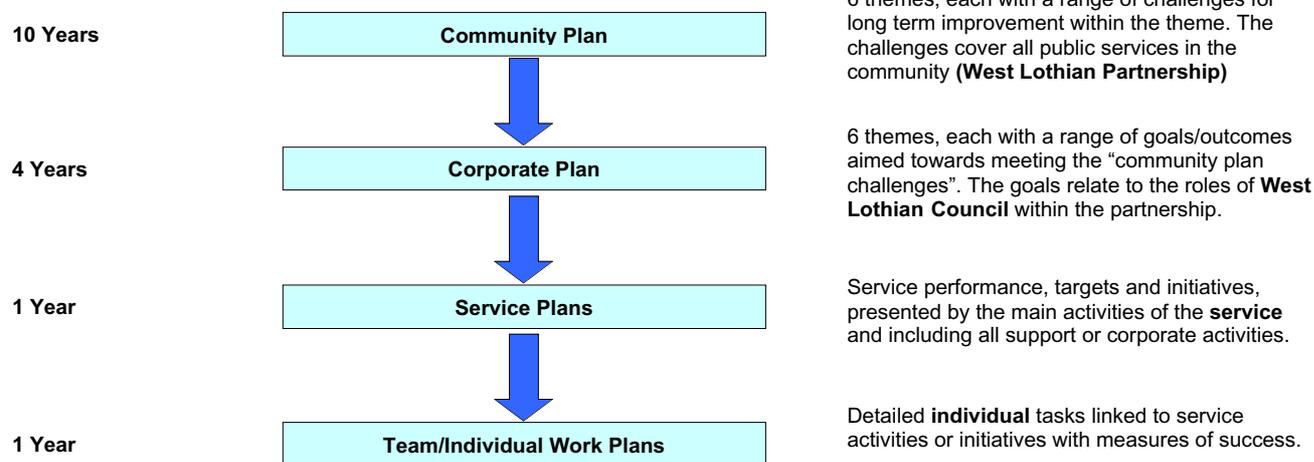
Source: West Lothian Council, Corporate Plan 2003-2007

22. The council operates an effective planning hierarchy and specific, measurable targets relating to corporate goals are included in relevant service plans. Service plans are in turn linked to employees' individual work plans ([Exhibit 3](#)), and are integrated with budgets. This enables the whole organisation to keep a clear focus on corporate priorities as all activity is linked to the corporate goals, values and principles.



Exhibit 3

The council has a clear planning hierarchy



Source: West Lothian Council, Planning and Continuous Improvement Framework

The community plan

23. The community plan sets out the broad strategy for the area. The community planning partnership took a systematic approach to producing it, seeking to resist the temptation to bolt all the current partnership initiatives together to produce a community plan. This gave them the opportunity to look strategically at new challenges.
24. In drawing up the plan, the partnership identified the challenges facing the area and used this information to develop a shared vision of where the area should be in ten years' time. The vision is for:
 - a knowledge based economy;
 - improved educational standards;
 - healthier, safe, attractive and environmentally sustainable communities; and,
 - a better quality of life for all residents.
25. Six themes were identified to provide a focus for achieving the vision and a working group for each theme drives the delivery of objectives. An outline of the six themes is given in [Exhibit 4](#). The partnership recognises the complexity of what it is seeking to achieve and that the six themes are interlinked and encompass cross cutting issues such as sustainability, social inclusion, ICT, and community learning.
26. Since producing the community plan in 2000, the council has published two reviews on behalf of the partnership - in 2002 and 2004. It intends to review the plan and its targets during 2005, with a



view to bringing it up to date with current community priorities. The revised plan will set out more focused targets, identifying timescales, responsibilities and resources. This will improve accountability as some targets in the 2000 community plan were not specific enough to measure progress against.

Exhibit 4

The community plan for West Lothian has six key themes

A learning community allows people in West Lothian to develop their potential to the full and enables them to become active and informed citizens.

A caring community is committed to looking after its more vulnerable members. Although West Lothian has a strong local economy, there are some people who are still affected by poverty, disability, ill health, unemployment or inadequate housing.

A prosperous community builds a modern, high performance, knowledge based economy for everyone in West Lothian, which raises average earnings above the Scottish average, increases school leavers' attainment, and which will ultimately raise people's life chances.

A changing community manages and balances the effects of the population growth, geographical diversity, increased need for services and facilities, and rises to the challenge of the dynamic nature of West Lothian. An environmentally sustainable community manages resources, water and land efficiently; promotes a physical environment which improves the quality of housing experience for individuals and develops a safer, more attractive environment for our towns, villages and estates.

A safer community is one where all aspects of safety are valued, and where crime is reduced, through partnership with communities. A safer community is one in which antisocial behaviour is less likely to flourish, accidents and incidence of fire are reduced and victims are supported. In such communities people are encouraged to adopt healthier lifestyles in relation to drug and alcohol abuse.

A healthy community is one where inequalities in health are reduced and one which promotes the health and well being of West Lothian citizens. A healthy community supports the development of healthy lifestyles and models of community based care which increase independent living.

Source: West Lothian Partnership: 'Shaping the Future', community plan for West Lothian 2000-2010

The corporate plan

27. The corporate plan sets out the council's strategic direction for the period 2003-2007. The plan identifies a clear set of values underpinned by a set of guiding principles as shown in [Exhibit 2](#). These values and principles provide an overarching framework within which the council operates and represent its strategic priorities.
28. The corporate plan translates the six themes identified in the community plan into priorities for the council under each theme. Examples of specific council priorities are shown in [Exhibit 5](#). The plan



sets out actions the council will take to deliver each of the goals. The corporate plan would benefit from including a selection of measurable targets against which achievements can be assessed.

Exhibit 5

The corporate plan identifies a number of specific priorities for the council.

Examples of the priorities for each corporate plan theme are shown below.

A learning community

- Raise standards of educational attainment
- Improve the learning environment
- Promote equality and inclusion and help students benefit fully from education with particular regard to students with additional support needs

A caring community

- Allow people who are dependent or with increasing dependency to live at home or in their local community
- Improve care services by joining up care and social work
- Maximise the potential for children and young people to lead full lives

A prosperous economy

- Maximise the potential of existing businesses
- Develop a culture of entrepreneurship resulting in higher business birth and survival rates
- Diversify the business/ economic base

A changing community

- Manage new development from population growth
- Support the development of town centres
- Encourage waste recycling

A safer community

- Deal with anti-social behaviour
- Improve standards of roads maintenance
- Create a safer physical environment

A healthy community

- Ensure that all public sector partners take action to improve the health of the West Lothian population by improving the circumstances in which people live
- Support individuals and groups to take action to improve their own lifestyle including taking more exercise, improving diet, stopping smoking, reducing alcohol and drug misuse.

Source: West Lothian Council, Corporate Plan 2003-2007

Leadership and culture

A major factor in the council's success is its culture. It has strong and effective leaders who set clear priorities and promote sound organisational values. Relationships between officers and members are professional and are characterised by mutual respect and trust.

29. The Chief Executive and Corporate Directors work with elected members to establish the strategic direction of the council, ensuring that both national and local priorities are addressed.



Relationships between officers and members are characterised by mutual respect and trust. This is reflected in the way they worked together to develop the council's values and guiding principles.

30. The council recognises that building a positive culture is essential to promote continuous improvement. It has a development programme in place for its senior managers and has established leadership and management competencies. Its management development programme has been endorsed by the Institute of Leadership and Management. The council is working with the Chartered Management Institute to further accredit its management programme.
31. The council has a streamlined committee structure, developed to support it in delivering the objectives identified in the community and corporate plans. There are five main committees; Policy Partnership and Resources, Children's Services and Lifelong Learning, Community Safety, Enterprise and Development, and Health and Care. The broad remits of the committees, and the overarching role of the Policy, Partnership and Resources Committee, have been successful in keeping a focus on key priorities and helping the council to combat the tendency to view services in isolation rather than from a 'joined up', user perspective.
32. In 2001 the council reviewed the way it worked to ensure it was properly organised to support the delivery of high quality, modern services and to help it become more responsive to its changing environment. It sought to ensure that services were better integrated and established a more streamlined and flexible management structure, reducing the number of directors and heads of service. Its current corporate management team comprises the Chief Executive, three corporate directors (Education and Cultural Services, Development and Environmental Services, Community and Support Services) and 10 heads of service.
33. The corporate directors are specifically charged with:
 - Taking a long term view.
 - Thinking beyond the constraints of the service, the directorate and the organisation.
 - Working with community planning partners.
 - Scanning the external environment and identifying key change factors.
 - Encouraging agreement about key priorities.
 - Ensuring a focus on priorities.
34. The emphasis on thinking beyond directorates and services at the highest levels of the organisation has created a culture where 'departmentalism' is easily identified and challenged. Each Director acts as Depute Chief Executive for six months. This ensures they maintain a strategic focus, and gives them direct experience of the work of the Chief Executive, providing continuity in his absence.



35. The Chief Executive and corporate management team are highly effective. They challenge areas of underperformance, display a corporate approach to issues, and are focused on user needs. The corporate management team meets for at least two hours each month and has a full business agenda. Reports are prepared by each head of service identifying significant issues for the service. The meetings also act as a forum for organisational learning, by discussing national policy initiatives and service developments, and sharing good practice. In addition the Chief Executive has weekly meetings with all three Directors and meets with them on an individual basis every month.

Openness

The council overall is open and transparent, using a range of methods to provide the public with useful information. It needs to further develop its public performance reporting, recognising recent statutory guidance.

36. The council overall has an open and transparent culture. It publishes useful information on its website including; the community and corporate plans, a helpful summary of its key goals and priorities, and minutes with supporting papers from council and committee meetings.
37. The council uses several methods to report its performance and achievements and publishes a range of information about its services. It has tailored its reporting to specific audiences through a number of targeted publications, including newsletters for staff, tenants, the over 50s, community councils and school boards, as well as some leaflets about specific services.
38. Its annual performance report (Factfile) and a quarterly newspaper are the main mechanisms for reporting council-wide performance to all residents and businesses. It has made an effort to tailor the information in Factfile by consulting the public and responding to their feedback. Factfile lists achievements under each of the corporate plan themes, and sets out goals for the forthcoming year. The information mainly describes what has been done, rather than providing detailed, comparative statistical information. Research conducted by the council suggested this is what the public wanted. Examples of the type of information included in Factfile are shown in [Exhibit 6](#). Residents providing feedback found Factfile easy to understand but a small number felt it reported only good news.
39. The council's public performance reporting should show performance against pre-set targets, demonstrating tangible outcomes for service users as this would improve accountability. In common with other councils, it should also provide a more balanced view of its performance, identifying areas for improvement as well as good performance. The council has recognised that it needs to further develop its public performance arrangements and has plans in place to address this.



Exhibit 6

The council publishes an annual performance report

The council's annual performance report gives narrative accounts of its achievements

Examples of what is reported in Factfile:

- Community centred health fairs providing information and advice related to drugs, alcohol and tobacco took place throughout West Lothian.
- The numbers of people occupying beds has been reduced with West Lothian achieving the lowest average waiting time for hospital discharge in Scotland. A total of 2,100 hospital bed days has been saved as a result of the Health and Social Care team's rapid response service.
- The council provided more than 8,000 pieces of community equipment to people who are over 64 years old to help them live independently in their own homes. And 80 people with mental health problems received housing support in their own tenancies.
- Modernising council houses has continued with the installation of around 4,000 new kitchens and bathrooms.

Source: West Lothian Council, Factfile 2004



Part 2: Is the council organised to support continuous improvement?

The council is well organised to deliver the continuous improvement in services that Best Value requires. Financial management is strong and resources are matched to priorities. It is improving the way it manages its staff and its assets. It uses information and communications technology very effectively to support its e-government agenda. It is establishing an ambitious performance management system which will support continuous improvement in services. Members need to develop their scrutiny role.

Using resources effectively

Managing people

The council recognises that good quality, well motivated staff are central to enabling it to deliver on its corporate objectives. It is improving its approach to workforce planning.

40. The corporate plan identifies 'developing employees' as one of the council's core values. It employs around 7,500 staff at an annual cost of approximately £150 million, representing a considerable investment. It is currently in the process of implementing a clear and well thought-out 'People Strategy' to ensure it has a suitably trained workforce to meet the current and future demand for its services. The main elements of the People Strategy are shown in [Exhibit 7](#). The People Strategy establishes the framework for a more co-ordinated corporate approach to workforce planning and staff development.
41. In 2001 the council became the first in Scotland to be awarded Investors in People accreditation across the whole organisation. It retained the accreditation in 2004. This demonstrates that it adheres to specified standards in staff appraisal and development.
42. The council acknowledges the key role of managers as leaders, responsible for fostering a positive, culture and reinforcing organisational values. It has designed a flexible management development programme to ensure that managers have the skills necessary to maximise the potential and performance of staff and ensure that the positive aspects of its organisational culture continue to develop. Planned development activities for staff include: e-learning, workshops, one to one coaching and mentoring, and structured secondments. Learning needs are identified through a competency framework, setting out expected behaviours and performance standards.



Exhibit 7

The council's People Strategy has three main aims.

The People Strategy is an overarching strategic vision which ensures a corporate approach to workforce planning, development and recognition. It has three aims:

- **'Winning the race for talent'** – focuses on recruiting and retaining a capable and talented workforce, committed to delivering excellent services to the people of West Lothian.
- **'Getting fit for management and leadership'** – focuses on raising the standard of management and leadership by helping managers to identify and develop the behaviours, skills and practices needed in their current and future roles as leaders and managers.
- **'Enabling our people to deliver'** – focuses on the behaviours, skills and knowledge needed to achieve individuals' potential and deliver what is expected of them, through service specific workforce strategies.

Source: West Lothian Council

43. The council has established a number of effective learning and development initiatives to maximise the potential of its workforce. These include:
 - An apprentice scheme for manual trades to address skill shortages in the general workforce and associated recruitment problems. Intake to this scheme has doubled, from 13 in 2002/03 to 26 in 2004/05.
 - Working with West Lothian College to train Housing and Customer Service staff to a recognised standard. In 2004, 64 staff attended a variety of certified courses including the Chartered Institute of Housing Diploma and the Institute of Leadership and Management certificate in management.
 - Working with West Lothian College to set up a social policy care learning centre. The council intends this to help meet its future demand for care workers. It is hoped that around 40 people a year will be attracted by a joint course in social and health care.
44. The council has an effective 'Celebrating Success' award scheme, which attracts an average of 130 applications a year. It is designed to recognise teams of employees who have delivered a high level of service. Each award is linked to one of the council's core values and there is a high level of support for the scheme from elected members and the corporate management team. The awards highlight examples of good practice and the scheme demonstrates a culture where staff are recognised and valued for providing high levels of service and finding innovative approaches to better service delivery.
45. 'Celebrating Success' contains several examples showing how staff have shaped the way services are delivered for the benefit of those who use them. Staff are also involved in service planning and a good example in the housing service is shown in [Exhibit 8](#).



Exhibit 8

Staff are involved in service planning

Each of the four housing and customer information service (CIS) teams spends two days away from their operational work in development sessions led by their Customer Services Manager with support from external consultants. The aim of the sessions is to ensure all staff are aware of the aims of the Council, how these relate to the service and their own role in delivering services, and to assess how the service is performing. Following the away days there is consultation with relevant stakeholders including tenants, community groups, other services and partners on the assessment and on local priorities for allocating resources.

The next stage is a consensus meeting for the service as a whole, involving a presentation to the Service Planning Forum by each Customer Services Manager on their team's assessment. The purpose of the consensus meeting is to agree the assessment, prioritise areas for improvement, establish responsibility for initiatives and agree targets. This may amend final locality plans, so that local initiatives and targets are integrated with service initiatives and targets.

Source: Audit Scotland, West Lothian Council

46. Meetings are held with trade union representatives twice monthly to discuss policy or employment relations issues. This enables the trade unions to be engaged at the early stages of proposed initiatives and raise any issues. The council does not undertake council wide staff surveys as it considers that consultation with staff is more effective when undertaken at service level. Staff consultation will become more systematic as it is monitored under the West Lothian Assessment Model (discussed below). The council should ensure that this enables it to collect and monitor appropriate information on staff attitudes across the council over time.
47. The sickness absence rate for craft and manual workers is 5.2% compared to a Scottish average of 6.3%. The Council ranks fifth across Scotland on this Statutory Performance Indicator. The sickness absence rate for professional, administrative, technical and clerical staff at 4.7% is slightly below the Scottish average of 5.2%. The absence rate for teachers is 3.9%, which is marginally above the Scottish average of 3.8%.

Managing Finance

Financial management is strong and the council matches its financial resources to its identified priorities.

48. Local external audit reports on the financial stewardship and governance of the council have been positive. The council has effective financial planning processes and operates a three year budgeting cycle, matching financial resources to corporate priorities. Members and officers review the financial strategy on an annual basis to ensure budgets are aligned with the priorities and objectives set out in the corporate plan.



49. The council takes effective action to protect its financial interest in organisations it funds. For example when the trust running its sport and leisure facilities ran into financial difficulties, the council appointed consultants to undertake an independent review and agreed a recovery strategy. It also increased the level of scrutiny to ensure that any future issues are identified quickly. The auditor concluded that in taking this action, the council had met its responsibility to ensure sound governance arrangements in a body receiving public funding.

Managing assets and controlling risk

The council is improving its approach to asset and risk management.

50. The council holds fixed assets worth approximately £816 million, mainly consisting of land and property. The corporate approach to asset management is being refined, with the aim of ensuring that assets are fully used for the benefit of the council as a whole. Following work done on the schools estate, good progress is being made in relation to other assets. Information from the asset management plan is now playing a role in capital spending decisions. As an example, the school estate management plan was used to focus effort where it was most needed to clear an identified backlog of maintenance work in schools.
51. The council is developing key performance indicators to measure and monitor the use of assets. Examples of indicators being introduced include: revenue running cost per square metre of internal floor space, and the value of reactive against planned, preventative maintenance spend for each building.
52. Risk management arrangements are reviewed regularly by the local external auditor. The council's approach to risk management is well developed and continues to be improved. Planned improvements include designating 'risk champions', to ensure services adopt the corporate approach to risk management.

Managing Information and Communications Technology

Information and Communications Technology has been used effectively to deliver e-government. The service has improved following a best value review.

53. One of the council's guiding principles identified in its corporate plan is to be 'an e-council...enabled by technology'. It is delivering very effectively on the e-government agenda. An external evaluation of the council's IT strategy supported this view, concluding that the council was further advanced in e-government planning and implementation than many other local authorities in the UK. The role and effectiveness of the council's IT service is an important factor in this success.



54. The council has improved the effectiveness of the IT service through a best value review carried out in 2002/03. This review showed that although costs compared favourably with other providers in the public and private sectors, customer satisfaction levels were low. In response it has successfully introduced a more customer and performance focused culture. This is supported by improved performance management and service plans, which now include both financial (unit cost) and customer satisfaction targets.
55. The council is continuing to refine performance measures for the IT service and develop more systematic reporting of outcomes against targets, both to elected members and to the corporate management team. It also plans to repeat the customer satisfaction survey to assess the degree of improvement since the best value review.

Buying goods and services

The council has introduced e-procurement and is making progress in realising its full benefits. As the system expands, it needs to systematically identify efficiency gains. The council should progress the planned development of its procurement policy to ensure that procurement effectively supports service delivery and provides value for money.

56. The council has introduced e-procurement and bought £21 million worth of goods and services through it in the last 18 months. This equates to around 25% of its annual revenue expenditure on supplies and services. It has demonstrated success in using e-procurement, for example saving an estimated £0.5 million by purchasing electricity through an electronic auction. The benefits of e-procurement are likely to increase significantly when the system is extended to education and operational services during 2005.
57. The council plans to use information in the system to rationalise its list of suppliers, with a view to getting better value for money from contracts and benefiting from economies of scale. As the system information matures, the council will assess the full benefits of moving to e-procurement. It is aware that efficiency savings need to be systematically identified and costed to enable them to be reallocated to areas which will have most impact on front line services. This has also presented the council with an opportunity to develop its procurement policy to ensure that it is supporting effective service delivery and providing value for money.
58. There is evidence that the council is open to considering different ways of procuring services. Recognising that there were a limited number of large suppliers of materials for roads and building contractors, the council restructured its contracts to separate the provision of building and roads maintenance services from the supply of materials. In this way it is able to benefit from bulk discounts when purchasing materials and smaller contractors are better able to compete for maintenance contracts.



Managing Performance

The council is developing a more sophisticated approach to performance management that will enable it to demonstrate whether it is delivering high quality, cost effective services and meeting its statutory duty of continuous improvement under Best Value. Further developing key performance indicators will show the cost and quality of its services, and support more systematic reporting of performance.

59. When the council's system for assessing continuous improvement is fully developed it will provide a rounded picture of performance. Individual services have been developing key indicators to manage performance, but there is variation in how well advanced this process is across the organisation. The Housing Service, for example, has a particularly well developed and effective approach to performance management. The council recognises the need for most services to be more systematic in measuring and reporting performance.
60. Performance is reported to the corporate management team mainly on an exception basis, focusing on highlights or problems in delivering initiatives and projects. Where services have made progress in developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), they are using them to manage their own performance, but are not consistently reporting the results to the corporate management team or committees to support effective scrutiny. Developing a suite of key performance indicators for every service, with a focus on cost effectiveness and outcomes for service users, will enable the council to better demonstrate whether services are improving.
61. Recently the major focus in performance management has been on developing the West Lothian Assessment Model (which promotes continuous improvement in services) and an 'Initiatives System' (which tracks performance on initiatives identified in community, corporate and service plans, and improvement actions identified by the West Lothian Assessment Model). The West Lothian Assessment Model is discussed in more detail below.
62. The Initiatives System can be used to produce monitoring reports on progress against objectives in the community, corporate and service plans. The system is designed so that elected members and council officers can access the information directly but the council should take advantage of the reporting potential of the system by producing regular reports for the corporate management team, elected members and the public. This will support scrutiny and accountability.

Scrutiny and accountability

Elected members and senior officers should determine the high level information they need to manage the council's performance and continue to drive improvement in services.

63. The council's open culture and the professional relationship between members and officers should enable a higher degree of constructive challenge than currently happens within committees.



Greater challenge from members would increase accountability and provide added impetus for continuous improvement in service delivery, as measured by outcomes for users.

64. Elected members' ability to hold council services to account for their performance varies across services, according to the performance information being reported to committees. Members, particularly conveners, receive informal performance briefings from officers on a regular basis. They also receive assurance from a number of external sources, including reports by inspectorates, and other assessment bodies (such as Investors in People and Charter Mark), and the council's record of achievement in award schemes (the council was recently highly commended in the Local Government Chronicle 'Council of the Year' award and has received many other awards).
65. As a result members are confident that services are being delivered to a high standard, and that officers would report any problems arising. While there are informal mechanisms for scrutiny outwith committees, more systematic reporting of performance to committees would improve transparency and accountability. The council has recognised that busy committee agendas restrict the time available to consider performance information and has established a cross-party Performance Panel. The panel comprises seven elected members, with a Labour majority of one.
66. One of the most important roles of the panel is to ensure that performance information produced by services is of a consistent standard, and is at the appropriate level of detail, to enable effective scrutiny by the main committees. However, its remit is very broad and it is also responsible for ensuring that:
 - consultation is done properly and regularly and findings are acted upon;
 - measures of policy effectiveness are available to service committees;
 - best value reviews are rigorous and comprehensive; and,
 - services are complying with best practice in publicly reporting to customers and citizens.
67. The panel has met seven times since it was established in October 2003 and its agenda to date has largely been determined by officers. Meeting more frequently, setting priorities in its work programme, and maintaining a clear focus on its remit would increase the effectiveness of the panel and help to ensure it covers all aspects of its remit. The council is currently reconsidering the role of the panel and how the effectiveness of scrutiny mechanisms can be increased.



Challenge and improvement

Challenge and improvement are embedded in the culture of the council.

68. The council has developed and implemented its own comprehensive self-assessment tool: the West Lothian Assessment Model (WLAM). The model supports continuous improvement and provides evidence of how well individual services are meeting the requirements of Best Value. The WLAM has been designed to encompass the requirements of recognised quality models, such as the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Quality Model, the Investors in People (IIP) standard and Charter Mark.
69. In order to ensure that the WLAM complements these tools and is integrated with other assessments, a partnership working group has been set up with Quality Scotland, Investors in People Scotland, the Cabinet Office and Charter Mark Assessment Services. The council has also consulted Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education about how their revised framework for inspecting the educational functions of councils could be integrated within the WLAM, to ensure a consistent approach.
70. The WLAM provides a structured framework for services to examine their systems and processes, the resources they use and what they achieve. To date, the council has completed WLAM assessments for all services, except schools and their supporting management, to establish a baseline position and the model has gained a high level of 'buy-in' from services. The council recognises that the initial assessment round for WLAM involved services in learning about the model and that the scores produced will need to be refined as staff gain experience of the WLAM.
71. The WLAM is designed to encourage services to identify and take ownership of their improvement agenda. The model includes an element of challenge from staff outwith the service being reviewed, which adds rigour to the self assessment and ensures consistency in the way things are being measured across services.
72. Staff have found the model useful in highlighting areas within services where improvement effort can best be focused. Implementing the WLAM has resulted in the process of challenge and review being embedded within the council's business processes to support continuous improvement in service delivery.
73. In addition to service reviews under the West Lothian Assessment Model, the council also plans to implement a new programme of thematic reviews using WLAM. This recognises the key role that joint working plays in delivering its objectives. Thematic reviews will examine cross-cutting areas such as the council's approach to 'modernising government'. Evidence from reviews examined in



the course of the audit suggests that the council has a sound process for undertaking reviews, which includes options appraisal, and is open to considering new ways of doing things.

74. Reviews include a 'critical friend' from outwith the council to provide independent challenge. For example, an independent social work consultant was involved in the recently completed review of looked after children and the principal of West Lothian College is chairing a review of the council's economic development service. Similarly, a former director of education from East Renfrewshire Council acted as a 'critical friend' in the best value review of secondary education.
75. The council has reconfigured services that were formerly subject to compulsory competitive tendering legislation to ensure a focus on customer needs, service performance and efficiency. It has removed the distinction between 'client' and 'contractor' to improve efficiency and uses the WLAM to test best value and competitiveness. Using the WLAM, it benchmarks costs, outputs and satisfaction levels. There is evidence of competitiveness with external organisations, for example:
- As part of the public private partnership for new schools, the in-house facilities management service won the cleaning, grounds maintenance and waste management contracts in open competition.
 - The council's roads service successfully competed against external contractors for work on a three year roads renewal programme.
76. The council looks for good practice, and attempts to benchmark costs and performance, both within and outwith the public sector. For example it measures itself against the private sector on performance, processes, training and best practice in the area of customer contact. It is due to host a conference on customer contact and Asda Walmart, Intelligent Finance and BskyB have all agreed to participate and exchange experiences. The Customer Information Service has benchmarked against Asda Walmart and this resulted in a change of practice and a more focused performance ethos within the service.



Part 3: How do services perform?

How well is the council meeting its strategic aims?

The Council has adopted a number of creative approaches to meeting its strategic aims. It is using technology to deliver modern, integrated services that are becoming easier for people to access. It has a clear commitment to equality of opportunity which is having an impact on service design. Sustainability is a major factor in its strategic decisions.

‘A connected council...’

The council is very good at working with partners to deliver ‘joined up’ services. The West Lothian Community Planning Partnership is well-established, having been built on existing working relationships.

77. One of the council’s guiding principles is to be a ‘connected council...at the heart of a network of partners’. Joint working is a particular strength, both between council services and with external partners. Elected members and senior officers have enthusiastically embraced their responsibility for leading the community planning process.
78. The community planning partnership involves decision makers from a wide range of partner organisations representing the public, private and voluntary sectors. The high level of commitment from all partners has enabled the partnership to deliver real improvements for service users.
79. The council takes overall responsibility for the community planning process and relationships with its key partners are sufficiently mature to enable responsibility to be shared. For example, community planning sub-groups are chaired by a variety of partners. Partners interviewed in the course of the audit were generally very positive about the council’s approach to joint working.
80. There are some excellent examples of better services being delivered as a result. Many are easier, and less time-consuming, for users to access. *West Lothian Connected*, a one-stop shop in the main shopping centre in Livingston, demonstrates clearly how working with a variety of partners can lead to better services. Details of this are shown at [Exhibit 9](#). *West Lothian Connected* offers a range of services from four public sector agencies. The services are housed under one roof and share a reception area and administrative support.



Exhibit 9

West Lothian Connected – delivering joined-up services to better meet customers' needs

West Lothian Connected is a 'one stop shop' in the Almondvale Shopping Centre in Livingston. It integrates the services of four main partners – the council, JobCentre Plus, the Inland Revenue and the NHS in West Lothian. The partners share the premises and administration facilities.

In addition to the core services of each partner, the shop also hosts local councillor's surgeries, Victim Support, Bereavement Counselling, Careers Advice, Legal Advice and the Advice Shop.

A single reception desk is shared by all four agencies, providing a single point of contact for customers. Staff from each agency take turns to service the reception desk. Customers requiring the services of more than one agency are fast-tracked by the staff from the first agency on to the second one, and so on.

With customers' permission, the agencies share relevant data with each other to save customers from having to provide the same information to each.

The shop has developed a fully joined up service for key client groups. As an example, staff from different agencies have been trained as bereavement officers who can co-ordinate all the services a bereaved person needs at this difficult time such as: registration of the death, amendment of benefits, changes in tenancy details and removal of housing adaptations.

Source: West Lothian Council

81. People using health and social care services are among the most vulnerable service users. The council and its partners recognise that it is important that these users have easy access to all the services they need. The Strathbrock Partnership Centre makes a strong contribution to the corporate plan goal of 'improving the care services by joining up health and social work services'. ([Exhibit 10](#)). The success of this venture is widely acknowledged and last year it won an APSE Service Award for Partnership Working and a COSLA Excellence Award for Health Improvement.

82. To realise greater benefits from joint working with the NHS, the council and NHS Lothian are establishing a Community Health and Care Partnership to provide joint primary health and social care services. This is at an early stage, but the intention is that budgets will be aligned and staff from both organisations will work together in mixed teams to a common management framework. The hope is to move to full integration in future years.



Exhibit 10

Strathbrock Partnership Centre offers a range of services under one roof.

The Strathbrock Partnership Centre is a unique development bringing together statutory, voluntary and private services within West Lothian in one location to maximise access to services. Opened in late 2002 it provides an extensive range of social and healthcare facilities under one roof. The project represents an innovative approach to the delivery of joined-up community-focused services.

The Centre's aims are:

- A shared agenda to improve services.
- Team working both within disciplines and across disciplines.
- A single point of access to the widest possible range of services.
- Shared information across all the partners.
- Shared use of resources.
- An increase in the health services available locally in the community.
- An emphasis on prevention.

The services available are: Social Work, Housing, Community Education, Council Information Services, Community Medicine, Mental Health Resource Centre, Pharmacy, G.P. Practices, Carers of West Lothian, and Capability Scotland.

Working to a common goal has allowed many of the traditional barriers between disciplines to be removed.

The Centre is very well used by local people, attracting approximately 13,000 visitors per week. Surveys have shown that most customers use more than one of the services per visit and that customer and staff satisfaction levels are high.

Source: West Lothian Council

83. The council is successfully using joint working to address the growing problem of antisocial behaviour. It has established a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency Neighbourhood Response Team (NRT) to deal with neighbour disputes and antisocial behaviour ([Exhibit 11](#)). As staff come from a variety of backgrounds, the NRT can respond quickly and effectively to a range of issues.

Exhibit 11

Tackling antisocial behaviour through joint working

The council has established a Neighbourhood Response Team (NRT) to deal with all neighbour disputes and antisocial behaviour, from both the public and private sector. The team, which was introduced in autumn 2003, comprises Community Safety Wardens, Drug Action Officers, victim support, a youth worker, a police officer and lawyer. The different specialisms of the staff involved allow the team to respond effectively to a range of antisocial issues, with the involvement of police allowing the team access to the police database.

Staff from the team are available 24 hours a day. Out of the normal operating hours of 12-8pm they provide a professional witness service to go out and evidence complaints. This has been well used, with approximately 20 calls being received at weekends and 15 calls during the week.

In its first year of operation the Neighbourhood Response Team received 1,162 cases. The majority of cases are noise related, closely followed by vandalism and youth issues. It successfully dealt with 569 of these cases and was still monitoring the remaining 593. From the cases referred to it, four Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and three interim ASBOs had been granted and five cases resolved through mediation.

Feedback from other organisations shows the NRT is having a positive impact. Lothian and Borders Police have reported a reduction in youth nuisance calls, with a marked reduction of over 30% at one particular shopping centre. Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade has also reported a significant reduction in hoax and malicious calls.

Source: West Lothian Council



84. The council recognises the important role that the voluntary sector plays in achieving the community and corporate plan objectives. Within West Lothian there are a broad range of voluntary organisations, to which the council provided around £4m of financial support during 2004/05. It monitors voluntary organisations effectively and reports achievements under each community plan theme to demonstrate the value it receives from the funding and support provided.
85. The council has undertaken best value reviews of voluntary organisations which it funds to encourage them to improve their services and the way they are managed. Those scoring highly were awarded three year funding agreements, while those reaching an acceptable standard were awarded one year funding agreements with development conditions attached. Where serious development needs were identified funding was awarded for 6 months with additional funding being dependent on strict conditions being met.

‘A customer focused council...’

The council engages effectively with its communities to ensure that services are provided in ways that suit their needs and preferences.

86. At the heart of the modernising agenda is the recognition that services should be provided in ways that suit the user. The Council is making good progress in breaking down traditional departmental cultures and boundaries to make services more seamless, accessible and personal.
87. The council identifies a focus on service users as one of its guiding principles: ‘a customer focused council...organised around the needs of the citizen’. It uses a range of mechanisms to consult with people. The council has a community engagement strategy and action plan outlining the range of activities being developed to inform, consult and involve people in the community planning process. This includes more ways of involving young people.
88. The methods used to engage with communities include:
- A Youth Congress, which was recently set up to represent young people’s issues.
 - Call-back surveys undertaken by contact centre staff to obtain the views of people who have recently received a service.
 - A network of 34 community councils. The community councils’ scheme is being reviewed in conjunction with the Association of Community Councils with the aim of making the community councils more accessible and representative, particularly in respect of young people.
 - Locality Planning and Area Co-ordination is used to engage with communities to develop local plans for their area.
 - Public meetings, workshops and open days for consultation on specific issues.



89. There is a Citizens Panel of around 1,500 West Lothian residents which is representative in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin, housing tenure and geographic area. The panel members take part in at least one major postal survey every year. Quality of Life Surveys were carried out in 1999, 2001 and 2004 and an Access to Services Survey was carried out in 2000. Members may also be called upon for mini-surveys, telephone surveys or to join small focus groups on a specific service or project. Panel members are told the results of the surveys they take part in and how the information from them will be used.
90. There are good examples of services being reshaped in response to feedback and of services being planned and delivered in the way that residents want. For example, a Quality of Life survey in 2001 showed that dog fouling, litter, glass and fly tipping were common concerns. In response, the council set up Neighbourhood Environment Teams (NETs) to tackle this. As a result there has been a marked improvement in the condition of open spaces ([Exhibit 12](#)).
91. Similarly, despite ranking top in the Statutory Performance Indicator for roads maintenance, the condition of roads and footpaths was identified as a major concern among communities and the council has committed £81 million to a three-year improvement programme.

Exhibit 12

Focusing on customers

A good example of the council reconfiguring services to focus on customer needs is the Neighbourhood Environment Teams and Land Services (NETs). The council set up NETs to more effectively tackle residents' concerns about issues such as dog fouling, litter, glass and fly tipping. These concerns were identified in the Quality of Life survey in 2001.

NETs were set up on a locality basis to provide a reactive environmental service tackling issues such as street cleaning, litter picking, graffiti, dog fouling, and minor grounds maintenance. The service reconfiguration to form NETs involved the integration of external environment, street cleansing and grounds maintenance services.

The reconfigured service focuses on customer needs by providing a more co-ordinated and holistic service through a single point of contact. To make NETs more responsive to local needs and priorities the council developed a service needs profile. This was developed through consultation with local communities. The council's enquiry tracking system was also used to identify particular issues and hotspots.

NETs provide a more intensive level of service than the previous arrangements. They are recording very high levels of customer satisfaction and are engendering a "feel good factor" in the community. The effectiveness of this service is beginning to be formally measured through data reports from the council's enquiry tracking and job allocation systems.

Source: West Lothian Council

92. Individual services within the council are engaging with their users in different ways and to differing degrees. For example, the Housing service has Tenants Panels, Tenants Satisfaction Surveys and innovative Tenant-Led Inspections. By using the West Lothian Assessment Model, other services (including social work, and building, roads and waste management) have recognised the need to become more systematic in their approach.



93. The council recognises that there are people who are more difficult to engage. It has piloted Community Engagement Standards developed by Communities Scotland, which highlight the need for different approaches to suit different communities. For example, in Ladywell an approach which involved a wide section of the community in discussions of local issues and planning for the future has delivered significant improvement in the physical and social environment and had a very positive reception from local residents. Improvements include; upgraded footpaths and street lighting, cleaner streets and provision of a drop-in centre for young people.

Customer services

94. The council has a network of Customer Information Services (CIS) and a Customer Service Centre, which offer a gateway for all council services. The Customer Service Centre, which handles contact by telephone, e-mail, fax, textphone, care alarms and the internet, is being used to develop expertise in all forms of customer contact.
95. Over the next few years the Customer Service Centre is expected to become the largest channel for remote customer contact with West Lothian Council. It provides a 24/7 service, taking in excess of 10,000 calls and 150 e-mails per month, and incorporates the council's out of hours help-lines, Careline and CCTV monitoring.

'An e-council...'

The council uses technology very effectively to deliver services that are easy to access.

96. The focus of the council's e-government agenda is the *Wired West Lothian* programme, which was developed with community planning partners. Through *Wired West Lothian* and other key strategies it has developed a number of initiatives that have used technology to make services easier to access. The council's approach supports its guiding principle of being 'an e-council...enabled by technology'.
97. A major focus for the council in developing its use of technology is the enquiry tracking system (ETS). The council has developed the ETS as its key system for tracking enquiries made by the public. The project was supported by the Modernising Government Fund. The ETS provides access to information on all council services and those of partner organisations and is being integrated with other council systems. This will enable data to be used more effectively to provide more responsive and streamlined services to the public.
98. The council's website West Lothian Online has been designed as a community portal with information not only about the council but also about other public and private partners. The website contains a good range of information, including committee minutes and supporting papers, and allows users to make payments and request a range of services online. The high quality of the



website has been recognised and it was identified by the Society of Information and Technology Management as one of the first transactional local authority websites.

99. Through the West Lothian Economic Partnership the council has recently launched a business portal and learning network to support local business development and promote the local economy. Targeted at businesses in West Lothian, but also designed for anyone with an interest in the local economy, it provides a useful resource with links to a wide range of learning and information resources for small and medium sized businesses. The Learning Network provides a flexible, accessible and affordable route for training for West Lothian's business community.
100. The council has adopted new technology as an integral component of its approach to e-care. This includes:
 - an electronic information sharing system at the Strathbrock Partnership Centre that enables both council and health staff to access agreed information on common customers (see [Exhibit 10](#));
 - an electronic form and single shared assessments for practitioners working with older people, that reduces duplication and speeds up decisions and access to resources; and
 - Smart technology installed in people's homes through the 'Opening Doors for Older People' programme allows them to live independently (see [Exhibit 13](#)).
101. The council is recognised as a leader in the use of Smart Technology. In March 2005, the Smart Homes scheme won the Best IT Solution award for primary and community care in the UK in a competition sponsored by the Department of Health in England. The scheme has attracted world-wide interest. In recent months the council has hosted visits by senior officials from the Hong Kong government and from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the UK.
102. Recognising the importance of technology in supporting educational objectives, such as independent learning, collaboration with others and communication skills, the council developed CREATIS (creating the information society in West Lothian). This was the first of its kind in Britain and has acted as the test bed for the National Grid for Learning. All schools were connected to the internet by 2002 and over 25,000 pupils and teachers have their own internet and e-mail accounts.



Exhibit 13

SMART systems – helping older people to stay safely in their own homes

Mr and Mrs Mackay are a couple in their 80s and Mrs Mackay has a tendency to wander due to Alzheimer's disease. Mr Mackay looks after his wife as best as he can, but he has hearing and visual impairments and doesn't always notice if she goes out, especially at night. Although their daughter Ann lives nearby and provides enormous support, she can't be there 24 hours a day. The Mackays experience flood and fire risks, due to Mrs Mackay forgetting to switch off or interfering with appliances. She had also been unable to deal with a bogus caller incident. The situation was becoming unmanageable for all concerned and, until their social worker suggested the use of new technology, it appeared that the Mackays would have to move into residential care.

The Mackays had a package of new technology installed which provides:

- A bed occupancy sensor, which senses if Mrs Mackay gets up in the night, automatically turns on a light to minimise the risk of falls and sets a timer running. If Mrs Mackay does not return to bed within 20 minutes, the system automatically sends a message to her daughter's mobile phone (or a careline). Her daughter can phone Mrs Mackay and encourage her to go back to bed.
- A wandering client monitor and a passive infra-red detector which, together, detect whether someone exits the front door and does not come back within pre-set time parameters.
- Flood, smoke and extreme temperature sensors, which provide early warning of potential hazards.

The technology means that the Mackays have retained their independence and privacy and the burden on their daughter is much reduced. Mrs Mackay is learning to control her wandering, because she knows it will disturb her daughter. Mr Mackay says the technology has "given us back a part of our lives that we wouldn't otherwise have had". Their daughter describes the package as a "circle of safety" for her parents, which has also provided much-needed reassurance for her.

Source: West Lothian Council. (Names have been changed to protect confidentiality)

'Providing equality of opportunities'

The council has a strong commitment to providing equality of opportunity and there are clear examples of the positive impact this has on services. It needs to get better at monitoring and reporting its performance in this area.

103. 'Providing equality of opportunities' is identified in the corporate plan as one of the council's underlying values. The council is continuing to develop an integrated and consistent approach to equalities across the organisation. It is doing this through mainstreaming equalities issues within individual services and through having a corporate working group on equalities to ensure a consistent approach to meeting its corporate duties on equalities.

104. The council has developed a good understanding of the nature and scale of equalities issues in its communities, and of the challenges which people from diverse backgrounds, and with different needs, may face in accessing its services. This knowledge is informed by consultation with key representative groups, including Disability West Lothian and the Multi-Cultural Forum. It is also improving its knowledge of ethnicity and disability amongst its staff through issuing questionnaires to all employees.



105. Staff are guided by a broad range of equalities policies covering the main legislative areas of race, disability and gender in both service delivery and employment. To improve its performance in providing equality of opportunity, the council has reviewed its current policies and is developing a single equalities policy to support a more integrated approach to equal opportunities. This will go beyond the statutory requirement to have a Race Equality Scheme (RES) and is being examined in conjunction with an external independent assessment of progress against its RES for 2003-2005.
106. There is evidence that the council is addressing equalities issues in its area and seeking to ensure its services are accessible to all potential users. For example:
- It has supported people from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups to become qualified environmental health consultants. These consultants work with the council's staff to improve its service and raise awareness of environmental health issues amongst BME communities.
 - In conjunction with the Commission for Racial Equality, the council employs an Ethnic Minority Development Worker in the advice shop in Bathgate. By actively promoting the services offered by the development worker through, for example, newsletters and visits to mosques, the BME community's use of the advice shop has increased beyond expectations.
 - The council has made significant progress on making its buildings physically accessible. It provides hearing induction loops in all main offices and is piloting the Language Line interpretation service across all its services.
 - It has established an Access Committee that grants funding to small businesses and voluntary organisations to help them make adjustments to their premises to allow access for people with physical disabilities. Applications to the committee are assessed by people with physical disabilities.
 - Equal opportunities is an integral element of the council's performance management system.
107. There is evidence of progress in tackling equalities issues. However, the council recognises it needs to collect, monitor and report the information necessary to measure achievements against its objectives and targets for equal opportunities, and to demonstrate positive outcomes for its residents. This is particularly important for the council in meeting its statutory duty to monitor services by ethnic group and demonstrate progress against its general duty for race equality.

'A changing community'

The council recognises it must respond to its high rate of population growth, and changes within the local economy, in a sustainable way. It demonstrates a high level of commitment and an integrated approach to sustainability.

108. The council is committed to ensuring that social, economic and environmental improvements are sustainable. The principle of sustainability underpins the way it plans and provides its services,



from housing and education, through transport and economic development to bio-diversity and waste management. It aims to ensure that its decisions meet present needs and safeguard the environment for the future.

109. The council's strong commitment to sustainability is demonstrated by a number of the goals identified under its community and corporate plan themes of 'a changing community'. These include:

- managing new development arising from population growth;
- protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment of its towns, villages and countryside; and,
- encouraging waste minimisation and waste recycling.

110. These goals are supported by more detailed operational plans. The council is currently agreeing a sustainability strategy that will provide a stronger link between the corporate plan, its operational plans and the Scottish Executive's sustainability indicators.

111. The council demonstrates an active commitment to sustainability in other ways. For example it was at the forefront in developing a Biodiversity Action Plan and in having a Soil Sustainability Action Plan. In addition, it has a corporate group that is developing a programme of training and awareness for staff over the next year so that it can meet its duty to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) on every policy from January 2006.

112. The rapid population growth in the area puts significant pressure on the environment, housing, schools and other resources. Schools in particular are at capacity in all the main communities. This poses a number of challenges for the council, including the need to ensure that planned developments will result in sustainable communities. Recognising the importance of sustainable development to continued economic prosperity, the council is taking an innovative approach to supporting growth in a way that minimises the impact on existing communities and the council's resources. Planners have worked closely with other council services, particularly education and cultural services, and with communities and developers to identify three large development areas, each of which will accommodate between 2,000 and 5,000 houses. Development on this scale enables developers to plan ahead and enables the council to negotiate funding from house builders for new infrastructure. This includes a number of new primary and secondary schools, which would represent a significant level of 'planning gain'.

113. The council has a strong commitment to recycling and has made good progress in some areas. For example:

- It is working towards meeting the Scottish Executive's waste recycling targets through its three bin scheme for all households.



- It has established a large-scale composting centre for composting green waste and cardboard collected in domestic bins and is aiming to achieve the BSI PAS 100 standard. This is providing benefits for NETs and Land Services which uses green waste for compost.
- It has established a successful joint venture company with Tarmac for recycling roads waste. The venture company is making an annual profit of around £130k, which is a significant turnaround from the previous position of making a loss of £100k.

114. As part of its overall approach to sustainability the council is also working to improve energy management. It has appointed an Energy Manager and is working on improving procurement and use of energy and water. It is improving energy awareness among staff by building energy related topics within staff training and induction programmes. As well the environmental benefits of better management of water and energy there have been significant financial benefits, including one-off savings of around £365,000 and annual savings of around £85,000.

115. Economic sustainability is a priority for the council in light of economic difficulties experienced by the area due to major industrial closures. The council's contribution to sustainable economic development is discussed below, in the context of the economic development service. The council is also contributing towards an integrated approach to economic and environmental development through its involvement in a Business Environment Partnership as highlighted in [Exhibit 14](#).

Exhibit 14

Along with the other Lothian councils, Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian, Scottish Water and SEPA, West Lothian Council is a key partner in a Business Environment Partnership (BEP). The BEP employs a dedicated Business Environmental Adviser for West Lothian who works closely with Economic Development staff. A key role for the Business Environmental Adviser is to manage the West Lothian Waste Minimisation and Environmental Management Initiative that assists small companies to become more competitive and realise the commercial benefits of improved environmental management. Specifically the Business Environmental Adviser provides practical advice to reduce costs, meet customers' environmental expectations and minimise commercial liabilities.

Through its involvement in the BEP the council has clearly contributed towards economic and environmental sustainability in West Lothian, with the work having a significant role to play in ensuring the competitiveness of West Lothian businesses. Since 1998 the BEP has:

- Assisted over 170 West Lothian companies and carried out 230 substantial projects for these clients covering a wide variety of topics.
- Identified over £1,100,000 cost savings, of which, over £686,000 have already been realised. As many of these savings are realised annually, the cumulative savings are estimated to already greater than £1,000,000.
- Helped 20 companies gain certification to ISO14001 Environmental Management Systems.
- Provided opportunities for 46 undergraduates to undertake environmental projects on behalf of West Lothian companies.
- Promoted the Initiative, its achievements and the sponsors at many events both locally and nationally and co-ordinated annual West Lothian Environmental Awards to raise awareness and encourage businesses to employ good environmental management.
- Prepared 10 successful applications to the Loan Action Scotland Scheme for energy efficiency improvements.

Source: Audit Scotland, West Lothian Council



How are individual services performing?

116. Audit Scotland publishes council profiles containing seventy-five performance indicators. While these do not give a comprehensive picture of performance across all services, they give an indication of comparative performance across a range of services:

- West Lothian was ranked in the upper quartile (8th or above out of 32 councils) on 28 measures and was in the lower quartile (25th or below) on only six. Of all Scottish councils it has the least number of Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) in the bottom quartile. It was one of only four councils to have 28 or more indicators in the top quartile. The council investigates reasons for poor performance as measured by SPIs and takes action to address them.
- The council's performance improved by at least 5% on 13 measures between 2001/02 and 2003/04, while 10 measures worsened by at least 5%. SPI performance in individual services is discussed further below.

117. For the purposes of the audit we selected the highest spending services with a direct impact on the public. We also looked at economic development because of its historic importance to the council.

Education

Education is a good quality service. HMIE judged eight of the eleven quality indicators used in their inspection as very good and the remaining three as good. Attainment levels are around the national average but show an improving trend. There is a clear vision for the service and it has highly committed and effective leaders.

118. Education accounts for about half of the council's total net revenue expenditure on services (£126 million in 2003/04). It employs around 3,200 staff of which 1,900 are teachers. The service contributes to the community and corporate plan theme of 'a learning community'.

119. The corporate plan identifies a key challenge as being to 'raise attainment and achievement for all, by learning together in partnership with students, parents/ carers and other agencies.' The council can demonstrate a general upward trend in the levels of attainment at both primary and secondary stages. These levels are currently around the national average.

120. The council has introduced a major strategic initiative, 'Succeeding Together', to give added impetus to raising attainment and achievement levels. The guiding principles of the initiative are described in [Exhibit 15](#). Consultancy and benchmarking for the project are being provided by Shell UK, which successfully implemented a similar approach. The success of the project will be evaluated after three years by Stirling University.



121. Education services are inspected regularly by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE). Audit Scotland works with HMIE on the inspection of each authority and we have relied on this work in forming a view of the service. The HMIE inspection report, published in September 2004, concluded: 'Overall, West Lothian council was an effective authority which was having significant positive impact on the work of its schools and the educational outcomes for children and young people'. HMIE use 11 quality indicators and the council was rated as 'very good' (the highest rating) in eight of the indicators, and 'good' in the remaining three.

Exhibit 15

The education service has a three year strategy to improve learning

Succeeding Together is guided by the following principles:

- an ethos of evidence based practice
- the development of a communication strategy to ensure that learning is networked throughout the organisation
- the requirement for all staff to have a clear focus and commitment to common objectives
- supportive management practices
- the delegation of responsibility
- cross-organisational working
- efficient knowledge management and communication systems maximising the performance of all staff.

Source: West Lothian Council 'Succeeding Together, March 2004

122. In **Part One** of this report we identified organisational culture, effective leadership and clarity of vision as reasons for the council's success. The HMIE report supports this view. It identifies; the clarity of aims and vision for education, the commitment of the Director and Heads of Service, the accessibility and approachability of all senior managers within the service, and the overall quality of teamwork among centrally employed staff as being among the education service's key strengths.

Social work

The council's social work service is providing good services to both adults and children, based on the evidence available. It has made significant service improvements in recent years, re-shaping them to deliver corporate and community plan objectives and giving them a clear focus on supporting people to live independently.

123. The council spent £46 million providing social work services in 2003/04. The service employed the equivalent of just over 1,000 full time staff. The council performs well on a range of Statutory Performance Indicators for social work, although it is difficult to form a complete picture of performance across the service as performance management systems need further development.



This issue was identified by the council as part of a recent review under the West Lothian Assessment Model.

124. The service successfully supports corporate and community plan priorities under the theme of 'a caring community'. The key challenges for the service are identified as: enabling people in need of support to live at home or in their local community; improving services by joining up health and social work services; and, maximising the potential for children and young people to lead full lives. The council, recognising that it is important that social work is linked closely to health, housing strategy, and community development, have combined these services within a Social Policy division. This has assisted in providing more seamless services.

Older people

125. The council's 'Opening Doors for Older People' initiative was delivered in partnership with the NHS and housing associations. It has increased choices for older people, with the objective of enabling them to remain as independent as possible until they are too frail to cope at home. [Exhibit 13](#) illustrates the benefits of using technology to give to older people more independence and reduce the burden on their carers.
126. The main features of Opening Doors for Older People were:
- To use technology to support people living in their own homes. A home safety service acts as a base system to which more features can be added. Available features include; movement sensors, fall detectors, bed and chair sensors and a video door entry system. Around 1,600 homes have home safety technology and the council aims to double this.
 - A 'Housing with Care' programme provides tenancies in houses equipped with support technology and an on-site staff team.
127. The council has focused on providing intensive home care to those clients in greatest need. Home care is becoming more flexible, with more care being provided in the evening and overnight. Statutory Performance Indicators show that the council ranks first across Scotland on this indicator. The increased availability and flexibility of intensive home care packages and alternative support has helped to significantly shorten the average stay in residential care from 3 years to 18 months.
128. The council has a high percentage of places in residential care homes for older people with en-suite (96% compared with a national average of 62%) and single rooms (94% compared with a national average of 85%).



Children

129. While there is a relatively high proportion of looked after children in West Lothian (11.8 per 1,000 compared with 10.9 nationally) children's services perform relatively well against Statutory Performance Indicators. In 2003/04 a high proportion of looked after children were cared for at home or in community placements - 91% against a Scottish average of around 87%. This was the third highest level across all Scottish local authorities.

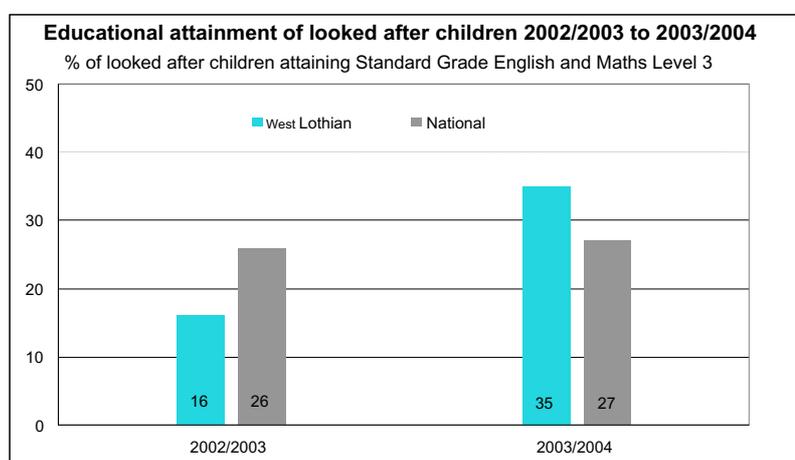
130. In addition:

- The proportion of staff in council managed residential homes for children with an appropriate qualification was relatively high - 75% compared to a national average of 52%, the fifth highest level across all Scottish local authorities.
- The level of privacy for children in residential care was relatively high with 95% having single rooms against a national average of 85%.
- The council submitted 41% of social background reports requested by the Children's Reporter within 20 days compared to a national average of 37.6%; and
- Social Work supervising officers saw 91% of children within the national target time of 15 days compared to an average of 79% across all Scottish local authorities.

131. Good joint work with education is proving to be very effective in raising the attainment levels of looked after children, as shown in [Exhibit 16](#). This is an area where the council had been performing poorly. Over the course of one year it has more than doubled the proportion of looked after children attaining standard grade English and Maths at level 3 and is now ahead of the national average.

Exhibit 16

The council has put effective measures in place to raise attainment levels of looked after children



Source: West Lothian Council, Standards and Quality Report 2003/04



132. The council's success derives from better inter-agency co-operation which has increased staff understanding of the complex issues faced by children in these circumstances. The council has established a multi-disciplinary team with responsibility for looked after children. The team includes teachers, an educational psychologist, a nurse, a children's rights officer, a mental health development worker and mental health link workers. The link worker's role is to work with children and young people and their parents and carers to promote attainment and achievement. There was a programme of training for education and social work staff, and a joint social work and education policy for looked after children clarifies the responsibilities of all those involved in the education of looked after children.
133. The Social Work Services Inspectorate report for 2003 highlighted the council's achievement in 'developing a range of throughcare support for young people who have been looked after by the Council, including preparing them for work and further education and getting suitable accommodation for them.'
134. As part of its commitment to improvement the council has recently completed a best value review of services to looked after children. This review has highlighted the positive impact that partnership working, co-location of social care and teaching staff and other initiatives are having on improving the life chances of looked after children. The review also highlighted that, with projected population growth, there is a need for further resourcing and increased joint working to ensure successful outcomes for these children.

Working with health services

135. It is essential that social work and health services are well integrated as they often share the same groups of service users. The council has worked with local NHS services to set up an innovative partnership arrangement at the Strathbrock Centre ([Exhibit 10](#)). This means that related services are available in one location. Most importantly, where clients give permission, the partners share data, lessening the burden on users to repeat the same information to obtain different services.
136. Keeping people in hospital for longer than necessary is costly to the public purse and can result in poorer outcomes when they are discharged. The council has worked well with its NHS partners to reduce the time spent waiting in hospital for a suitable alternative care package, as shown in [Exhibit 17](#). Based on figures at October 2004, the average time patients in West Lothian waited to be discharged from hospital following a social work assessment was 46 days, compared to a national average of 106 days. Half of those patients waited no more than nine days, the shortest waiting time in Scotland.



Exhibit 17

Delayed discharges – tackling the priority area of bed-blocking

By planning and managing together, the council and the NHS have reduced the number of people waiting for discharge from hospital by 60%.

West Lothian Council and West Lothian Healthcare NHS Trust (now a Division of NHS Lothian) established a joint Health and Care Support Service with a rapid response service to prevent admission to hospital, or to enable people to be discharged from hospital earlier than would have previously been possible.

Measures were introduced to:

- develop alternatives to hospital admission
- reduce hospital admissions
- manage admissions and discharges
- manage care home placements

These included:

- investment in smart home technology
- introduction of discharge co-coordinators
- interim care home placements
- monthly meetings between senior managers from both organisations, key clinicians and frontline staff to monitor progress.

As a result of these actions an estimated 3,200 bed nights were saved during 2003-05.

Source: Audit Scotland, West Lothian Council

Housing

The council is delivering a high quality housing service which has been recognised by a number of awards. It actively promotes opportunities for tenants to influence housing services.

137. The council has a stock of around 14,000 houses. It collects rents of around £34 million per year and spends around £9 million a year on repairs and maintenance. The council's housing and homelessness services are inspected by Communities Scotland. West Lothian has been included in Communities Scotland's programme of inspections for 2005/06.

138. The council is delivering major improvements in housing quality for tenants through an innovative £6.5m programme of installing new kitchens and bathrooms in every council house within five years. It is funding the improvements by adding £5 to the weekly rent. This represents a large increase relative to average rent rises nationally. However, the programme was voted for by tenants and has resulted in high levels of tenant satisfaction.

139. The Housing Service has a strong performance culture and a systematic approach to planning and managing performance. Through its well defined planning framework it has a highly structured set of clear plans to manage its services. It regularly monitors and reports detailed performance information to demonstrate progress against service aims and systematically reviews performance.

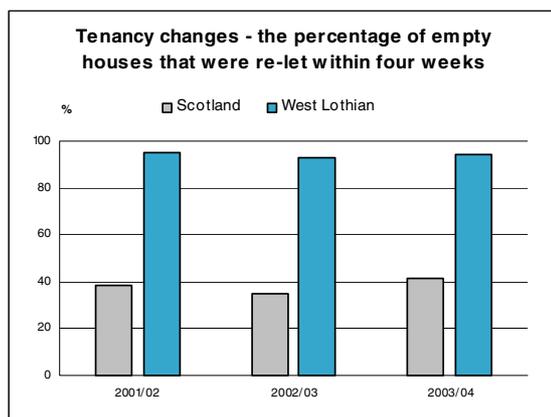
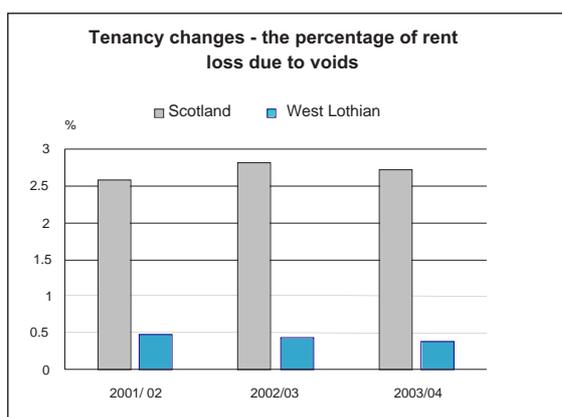


The service was largely responsible for developing and driving the implementation of the West Lothian Assessment Model across the council.

- 140. The council's housing stock is well managed and Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) are very good. For 2003/04, the time taken for the council to re-let its houses and the amount of lost rent through empty houses was better than all other Scottish authorities ([Exhibit 18](#)). The level of rent arrears has reduced every year since 1997 and is currently less than half the national average.
- 141. Delivering high quality customer focused services is central to the ethos of the Housing Service. This is reflected in the opportunities it creates for tenants to shape services, the high levels of satisfaction amongst tenants, its achievement of Charter Marks (for its local service delivery, repairs service and tenant participation) and a range of national and European awards.
- 142. Every year it has a programme of Tenant Led Inspections covering a range of issues and this has been recognised as an innovative approach to involving tenants in assessing services and generating continuous improvement. To date around 13 tenant led inspections have been carried out. The inspections are well structured and have been useful in identifying key areas for improvement from a service user perspective. The Housing Service has responded well to these inspections through implementing detailed improvement plans.

Exhibit 18

The council performs very well in its management of empty houses



Source: Audit Scotland, Statutory performance indicators



Operational Services

There is evidence of good performance by Operational Services but more formal and systematic reporting of performance needs to be developed.

143. Operational Services delivers a wide range of services, including road and grounds maintenance, cleansing, and fleet management. In line with the council's stated principle of being 'organised around the needs of the citizen' there is a clear customer focus in the delivery of these services.
144. The service has a good performance management framework in place. It manages its performance against key performance indicators relating to costs, outputs and service quality. The indicators used in many areas have been reviewed and modified and as a result, there is limited trend information available to demonstrate continuous improvement.
145. Although general service performance is reported to the committee convener on an informal basis through the year, there should be more formal and systematic reporting of key performance information to members to improve transparency and accountability.

Building Services

146. Building services carry out all maintenance and major works relating to council properties, including work associated with the kitchen and bathroom replacement programme for Housing. The service has a good track record of completing housing repairs within locally set targets. Statutory Performance indicators show that over 94% of housing repairs are completed to timescale.
147. In an effort to enhance the service provided to tenants, a Best Value review was undertaken in 2004. As a result, the use of local repair teams for minor and emergency repairs was introduced to increase responsiveness. Tenant satisfaction with local response teams and the housing repairs service is high at 98% and 92% respectively. A challenge for the service is to reflect the responsiveness and quality levels achieved in housing repairs throughout the whole of the repairs service.

Roads Services

148. The council ranked first across Scotland for the condition of its roads in recent statutory performance indicators with only 23% of its roads network needing to be considered for maintenance. This compares to a Scottish average of 45%. The council's performance information for the last year shows the competitiveness of its roads maintenance service against external competition.



149. The council is delivering its £81million roads upgrade programme through a mix of its own staff and external contractors. The work is carried out by council staff where this is judged to be more cost effective, and this has led to costs being around £1 million less than anticipated in the first year of the programme. These budget savings are being reinvested in this priority area, allowing more projects to be undertaken.
150. As well as focusing on efficiency, the service also has a strong focus on quality. To support this it has introduced a '*considerate contractor*' scheme, requiring all contractors to abide by common standards of quality and customer care.
151. Statutory Performance Indicators show that 93% of traffic lights are repaired within 48 hours and 95% of street lights are repaired within seven days. These figures are close to the Scottish average. The service has developed a number of key performance indicators to support the statutory indicators for roads. Some of these indicators have only recently been established making it difficult to draw conclusions about performance. As an example, the indicator for the percentage of road works completed within 28 days is now being measured against a target of 80%, but data for a full year is not yet available.

Waste Management Services

152. Waste management services are responsible for collecting and disposing of domestic and commercial refuse, and providing recycling facilities and services. In common with other authorities, the focus of the service has been on recycling and waste reduction.
153. To improve the recycling of domestic waste a three bin collection system is being introduced to collect biodegradable waste, recyclable materials and general waste. The council estimates that 50% of domestic waste is being recycled through this scheme and it is being rolled out across all households. Although recycling of commercial waste is much lower than for domestic waste, the council is projecting a significant increase in its overall performance for recycling. In 2003/04 it recycled 11.1% of waste compared with a national average of 12.3%.
154. The council's cost of collecting refuse, at £51.35 per property is around the Scottish average. It performs better on the cost of refuse disposal which, at £46.24 per property, is well below the Scottish average of £58.43. The service performs well in responding to requests for special uplifts of bulky domestic waste with 97.2% of uplifts made within 5 days. This compares to a Scottish average of 78.8%.



Economic development

The economic development service has been successful in working with partners to combat the loss of major employers in the area. It is working well with the education service to encourage young people to develop business skills.

155. The economic development service contributes to the community and corporate plan themes of 'a prosperous community' (by encouraging economic growth) and 'a learning community' (by supporting people to develop their skills). The service's plans are clearly linked to the relevant corporate and community goals. The service has a core budget of approximately £1 million and in 2004/05 attracted £2 million of external funding. The service employs 38 staff.
156. West Lothian has been very successful in terms of economic development despite facing some major challenges. It dealt with the collapse of traditional industries by encouraging inward investment from electronics manufacturing companies. It has also responded well to the subsequent collapse of the electronics manufacturing sector that resulted in around 10,000 job losses in 2001/02.
157. The main focus for economic development since 2001 has been to deliver the three-year West Lothian Strategic Action Plan, which was the West Lothian Economic Partnership's response to the closure of Motorola and NEC Semiconductors. The closure of Motorola represented the biggest inward investment loss in the UK and highlighted the over dependence on a small number of large companies and the need for diversity within the West Lothian economy – 20% of the economy in West Lothian was in electronics manufacturing and 40% of the workforce were employed in 1% of the companies. The council recognises that around 16,000 jobs in West Lothian that still rely on foreign owned companies remain potentially vulnerable due to greater globalisation and future changes in central government assistance.
158. The challenges that the council and its economic development partners have faced in recent years provided impetus for better joint working. This has produced positive outcomes including significant growth in retailing and other business sectors. In 2001 West Lothian had the lowest number of public sector jobs of any area. This has increased recently through the relocation of public sector bodies, and is due to increase further with the development of a new prison.
159. West Lothian experiences one of the lowest levels of self-employment in the country. As the area's economic well-being is increasingly dependent on the success of home grown businesses, the council has developed a range of initiatives to try and address this through the West Lothian Strategic Action Plan. It is seeing some positive results in increasing self-employment, for example working with Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothians it has seen a considerable increase in the number of business start ups assisted through the business start up programme. In 2003/04 there



were 336 business starts assisted, an increase of 17% over the previous year. Council figures show that fifteen years ago only 36 new businesses were assisted.

160. The council is also improving links between the economic development service and education. Through its 'Succeeding Together' initiative the service has a specific business advisor linked to each cluster of schools to support young enterprise and give business advice.
161. The council is also working to integrate economic and environmental sustainability. It has an Environmental Business Advisor who is working with over 30 companies on waste and energy related issues that have generated over £1m in sustainable savings. This is supported by the development of good practice guides and an award scheme. Other initiatives include; economic development funding being used in conjunction with landfill tax credits to fund a Business Environment Project for waste minimisation and having an environmental task force that generates placements or jobs for New Deal participants.
162. Given the changing economic circumstances of the area and the reduction in central government and European funds available to support economic development, the council is undertaking a fundamental review of the service. This will be chaired by the principal of West Lothian College who will provide external challenge.



Part 4: What needs to improve?

West Lothian Council is clearly focused on continuous improvement and this is embedded in its management processes. Its organisational culture supports constructive challenge with a focus on improving users' experience of services. Where the need for improvement is identified the council acts effectively.

Developing an improvement culture

163. Continuous improvement in public services and local governance lie at the heart of Best Value and Community Planning. Local authorities must develop an improvement culture across all service areas. Elected members and officers must focus on key policy objectives and the needs of service users and communities, and be driven by a desire to achieve the highest possible standards in service delivery. This requires a culture where areas in need of improvement are identified and openly discussed and in which service performance is constructively challenged.
164. West Lothian Council is open to new ways of doing things and is creative and innovative in its approach to delivering user focused services. It has embedded review and challenge into its management processes. Through the West Lothian Assessment Model it has a systematic approach to identifying areas for improvement, and it drives these forward through improvement plans for individual services. It also has clear strategies for organisational development to ensure that its staff are able to respond flexibly to a changing environment and new ways of delivering services.
165. Members need to engage more actively and systematically with their responsibility to scrutinise service performance. The council has the capacity to do this and needs to ensure that its member development strategy addresses this. Improved performance reporting will assist members in their scrutiny function.
166. The council is committed to continuously improving its services. It needs to demonstrate more effectively how this has resulted in better services for users by systematically measuring performance improvement. It has ambitious plans for a comprehensive performance management system and in developing this should incorporate key performance indicators that measure cost and service quality. It should progress its development of a procurement policy to ensure that procurement is supporting effective service delivery and providing value for money.



167. The council's improvement plan demonstrates its awareness of the areas it needs to improve, and it is finalising a detailed action plan to address these. Its progress on implementing the action plan will be monitored by the local external auditor over the next three years.

West Lothian Council's improvement agenda

- Continue to develop a comprehensive performance management system including the West Lothian Assessment Model, the Initiatives System and Key Performance Indicators.
- Establish and implement a development strategy for members to support them in effectively carrying out their scrutiny role.
- Further develop public performance reporting in line with statutory guidance.
- Identify further opportunities to realign services in relation to efficient government.
- Under the modernising government agenda, explore further opportunities for service enhancements in relation to all areas of front line service delivery with priority given to the integration of activities, such as; customer relationship management, smart cards and e care.
- Conduct a mid-point review of the Community Plan to identify future priorities.
- Continue to develop the process for managing and reducing the business risk to the council.
- Continue to develop its strategic approach to procurement, to ensure it supports effective service delivery and provides value for money.

West Lothian Council

The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning



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