

FOREWORD BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE – ROB SYKES

It is my pleasure to introduce Worcestershire County Council's third Best Value Performance Plan. This document outlines how we as a Council are performing and what our priorities and plans are for the future.

This annual publication sets out how we are performing across all of the essential services we provide, from schools, libraries and roads to care for elderly and vulnerable people, support for local business and consumer protection.

But the Council is not just here to provide services, we recognise that we have a role as community leaders: Our Vision is "Progress to Excellence" which reflects and ties in our policy priorities which are represented using the initials PROGRESS. We aim to work with local people and in partnership with other organisations to improve and sustain the social, economic and environmental well - being of the people of Worcestershire.

A lot has been achieved over the past year and we have substantially improved our performance since the first plan was published in 2000. We have progressed from ranking 31 out of 34 county councils in 1998/99 to 20th position in figures released for 2000/01. This has been achieved in spite of Worcestershire having one of the lowest spending levels in the country and I would like to take this opportunity to thank our staff for all their efforts in helping us to improve over the year. However, we are well aware that there is more that can be done and we will continue to strive for improvement.

The year ahead brings new challenges. We have recently signed a Local Public Service Agreement with central government, which requires us to improve a number of our services. If we are successful, in return we will receive nearly £10 million extra funding which we can invest to provide even better services. This agreement was achieved by working closely with colleagues in the District Councils, the Fire Authority and the Police Authority. The agreement will ensure that the services we provide with our partners will improve at a faster rate than we had originally planned.

A newspaper summary of our performance, set out in a special edition of the 'Worcestershire Beacon' was sent out to every home in the County as well as to businesses and voluntary organisations during April. This document provides more of the detail behind the stories in that newspaper.

We welcome your comments on this plan. Please send back the comments sheet at the back of this document or contact John Williams in the Policy Unit at County Hall, Worcester (Tel. 01905 766680; e-mail jwilliams@worcestershire.gov.uk)

The performance information within this document outlines audited national performance indicators for 2000/01 and non-audited, estimated or actual indicators (as marked) for 2001/02 as well as the Council's key achievements against our policy priorities for 2001/02.

Worcestershire County Council is responsible for the preparation of this Best Value Performance Plan and for the information and assessments set out within it, and the assumptions and estimates on which they are based. The Council is also responsible for setting in place appropriate performance management and internal control systems from which the information and assessments in the Performance Plan have been derived. The Council is satisfied that the information and assessments included in the plan are, in all material respects, accurate and complete and that the Plan is realistic and achievable.