

CPA Progress Assessment

13 June 2005



CPA Progress Assessment Report

Selby District Council

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Progress assessments

In 2002, Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was introduced at single tier and county councils (ST&CCs) and at district councils in 2003/04, as a way of supporting councils to deliver improvements in services to local people.

CPA brought together existing information on service performance in councils with a corporate assessment of each council's ability to improve. This was used to reach an overall conclusion about whether a council was 'excellent', 'good', 'fair', 'weak' or 'poor'.

Councils have prepared improvement plans following CPA and those councils classified as 'poorly performing' have been the subject of engagement by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and early progress assessments by the Audit Commission. Through its network of relationship managers, the Commission worked closely with lead officials assigned by the ODPM in developing an appropriate monitoring programme.

Audit Commission progress assessment work has sought to measure the impact and sustainability of improvement activity. The progress assessment work has been tailored to local circumstances to provide appropriate public assurance and contribute to improvement reporting. It involved an evidence-based judgement on progress against the original corporate assessment criteria, but without producing a score.

The progress assessment is part of the Commission's commitment to helping councils ensure continuous improvement to services for local people. It does this in the context of its strategic regulation principles, which look to minimise the burden of regulation at the same time as maximising its impact. We are committed to working in partnership with other regulators and the ODPM in this aim.

Introduction

- 1 In May 2004, the Audit Commission published a Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Selby District Council. This assessment categorised the Council as **weak**. The key strengths and weaknesses from this assessment are set out in Appendix 1.
- 2 This report presents an analysis of the Council's progress to date, based on the Council's implementation of its improvement and recovery plan and comparison with the baseline position of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

Summary and recommendations

- 3 The Council's progress in response to CPA 2004 has been limited but key mechanisms are now being put in place. The Council made a slow start and whilst recently the pace has speeded up considerably, it is still too early for many of the changes to have had an impact. While the Council engaged consultants and created its own internal change team in the autumn of 2004 the improvement plan was not approved until January 2005. The bid for capacity building funds was submitted to the ODPM in October and approved in December. Slow progress has meant many planned improvements are only now being executed.
- 4 The Council's self-awareness has increased and it recognises the need for change. In response to criticisms around the lack of clarity of ambitions and priorities, the Council developed a vision based on the twin roles of community leadership and service commissioning. Clear priorities have been identified and linked to resources by a priority-based budgeting exercise. These led to a new corporate plan with seven priorities for the coming year. There has been a considerable increase in the Council's focus at political and managerial level.
- 5 Members are now more aware of their roles and responsibilities as a result both of training and of experience in power. The LSP has been revitalised through the addition of officer support, the process of developing a new community strategy, and the creation of sub-groups to support implementation. Service commissioning is advancing through the creation of partnerships with other authorities.
- 6 The Council was slow to address criticisms of its senior management arrangements but a review is currently being carried out. This is intended to create a smaller more strategic management team, supported by a partly new tier of heads of service. Appointments to these posts will be on a competency basis.
- 7 The Council still has a tendency to focus on obstacles and identify reasons for why things can't be done. The most common examples quoted are financial constraints and recruitment and retention difficulties. The Council's three-year financial strategy relies upon the use of its reserves each year to transform key services. The Council recognises that this use of reserves is not sustainable in the long-term and is employing consultants to help develop a more robust long-term financial strategy. The Council regularly faces staff shortages in key services and is currently exploring how it can outsource these services through partnering arrangements.
- 8 The Council still delivers below average performance in many services. While in the weaker services a majority of indicators record improvement, the Council is not sufficiently focused on improving outcomes for residents. Changes are now being made to focus on improving priority services.

- 9 It is recommended that the Council:
- actively and promptly shares the findings of this assessment with staff;
 - takes it to an appropriate public committee meeting; and
 - uses the key findings as the basis for reviewing the Improvement Plan in conjunction with the Improvement Board.

Context

The locality

- 10 Selby district has a population of 76,500. The district comprises the towns of Selby, Tadcaster and Sherburn-in-Elmet, and a large sparsely populated rural area. Ethnicity is low at less than 1 per cent, and the district is relatively affluent, having the third highest household income in North Yorkshire. There are some pockets of deprivation with five wards being amongst the 25 per cent most deprived in the country. Car and home ownership levels are high, and house prices in the district have risen by 143 per cent in the last five years. There are 70 parishes in the district, which have formed into six groups to agree community investment prospectuses (CIPs).
- 11 The economy of the district has been affected by the closure of the Selby coalfield in 2004 causing 650 residents to lose their jobs. Other industries include agriculture, brewing at Tadcaster, and power stations at Eggborough and Drax. The district has locational advantages, bordered by the A1 and M62 motorways, and bisected by the east coast main line railway. The recent opening of the Selby by-pass has improved accessibility, and released land for development.

The Council

- 12 The Council changed from no overall control to a Conservative administration at the last election in May 2003. The Council continues to operate under the fourth option arrangement with a leader, three boards – economy, environment and social – and five committees – policy and resources, planning, licensing, overview and scrutiny, and standards. This arrangement is currently subject to review.
- 13 A review of senior management arrangements is currently under way with a view to enhancing the Council's strategic capacity. The Council's gross budget for 2005/06 is £38.2 million, an increase of almost £4 million on the previous year, and the net revenue expenditure £9.4 million, compared to £9 million the previous year. The Council employs approximately 340 staff.

What is the Council trying to achieve?

- 14 The Council has made progress in defining its ambition and priorities more clearly.
- 15 Following the criticism in the CPA report that the Council did not have a clear statement of its ambitions or priorities, the Council has clarified both its ambitions for the area, and its vision for the future. This has culminated in the recent publication of both a new community strategy and a new corporate plan. The community strategy has been developed through the Selby Strategy Forum – the LSP – through an extensive consultation and discussion process involving partners, stakeholders and local communities and has the full support of all partners. The development of the strategy and the action planning process currently being undertaken by sub-groups, has had the effect of revitalising the strategy forum which is highly regarded by the Council's partners.
- 16 The Council has adopted a ten-year vision of developing community leadership, and commissioning services for the people of the district. This vision, and the results of a prioritisation exercise undertaken during 2004, have been distilled into a new (April 2005) corporate plan which sets out seven priorities for the coming year. These priorities are: access to services, community safety, youth provision, waste minimisation and management, regeneration of the three market towns, affordable housing, and a well managed council.
- 17 The clarification of priorities has allowed the Council to target its resources better on those priorities. The Council now has a medium-term financial plan looking three years ahead and is developing a longer-term financial plan. For the first time this year the Council went through a priority-based budget exercise based on a point scoring system to target resources at priority areas. This resulted in £0.4 million being shifted from lower to higher priority areas, for example out of leisure services, public conveniences, and senior management posts and into recycling and facilities for youth.
- 18 The clarification of priorities has also enabled greater focus throughout the Council's work. A list of priority projects has been agreed which is based on available management capacity so the Council is no longer trying to do everything at once. The LSP is more focused on outcomes as a result of the action planning process. Council members are more focused on priorities, and the achievement of the improvement plan, and it is easier for officers to resist demands from members for non priority work. However, the Council's staff survey taken in November 2004 suggested a low level of awareness by staff of what the Council is trying to achieve. In response, the Council intends to improve the way in which its priorities are communicated.

How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?

- 19 The Council is starting to make progress in developing its capacity but developments in this area are recent and the potential impact in improving community outcomes has yet to be fully realised. The Council is continuing to develop the use of its performance management systems so that information leads to service improvement.
- 20 The Council's ability to retain and recruit the staff it needs is hampered by the salary levels offered by its larger local authority neighbours. Some key services such as development control and housing maintenance regularly suffer from staff shortages. The Council does not have a corporate recruitment and retention strategy to address this but we note the intention to outsource service delivery through partnering arrangements, which the Council sees as a solution to this issue.
- 21 The financial capacity of the Council is under pressure. Existing spending levels cannot be maintained in the long-term and the medium-term financial plan does not set a minimum level of reserves. The Council is continuing to use reserves to support its revenue budget – just over £2.5 million of reserves have been used in this way in the last three years.
- 22 The Council is starting to address member development. A new strategy has been adopted which includes plans for new member induction, the opportunity to attend leadership training for leading members, the provision of mentors, and a range of courses which are tailored to the different roles members play. Peer mentors have been appointed for both conservative and labour groups and the leader has attended a leadership academy but it is too early for most of this to have had an impact.
- 23 Overview and scrutiny arrangements have improved. The committee has developed its role to include policy reviews, external partner relations, and performance management. Aspects of scrutiny work in the Council have achieved national recognition and the Council hosted a conference on the subject. Members generally are growing in confidence to challenge performance.
- 24 Action has been taken to strengthen capacity through, for example, extensive use of consultants and the Council has also created an internal change team to work alongside consultants and 'shepherd' improvement. A senior officer has been appointed on a temporary basis to assist the chief executive in supporting the LSP. The change team is working closely with a new 'managers' forum' which is a group of service heads who meet to progress corporate improvement projects. The Council has also had two conferences for a wider group of managers to keep them informed about the improvement plan and the changes needed.
- 25 Improvements are being made to service planning and performance management arrangements. Consultants are working with the Council to update service plans, starting with the vulnerable services identified in the improvement plan as pilots.

What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?

- 26 The Council's services have started to improve, and the Council is investing heavily in its improvement programme and other priority initiatives for the future.
- 27 The Council's performance as measured by performance indicators has started to improve. When comparing the Council to others in the CPA we reported that 69 per cent of indicators were below the median in 2002/03. This has improved slightly to 65 per cent in 2003/04. Overall 52 per cent of indicators improved in 2003/04. If satisfaction survey indicators, which nationally have shown a reduction, are excluded then 65 per cent of performance indicators improved.
- 28 Following CPA, the Council identified in its improvement plan four vulnerable services in greatest need of improvement. These are property services (housing maintenance), housing benefits, street cleansing and development control. The average time taken to process new housing benefit claims has improved from 39.8 to 31 days with an improvement in accuracy from 96 per cent to 99 per cent. Performance in development control remains poor and as a result, Selby is a planning standards authority and will continue to be monitored by the ODPM.
- 29 We have re-inspected the housing maintenance service which improved its rating to one star and promising, as a result of improved customer focus and involvement. The Council has concluded a private finance initiative (PFI) scheme with a local housing association for the delivery of 250 affordable homes over a five-year period, and the first of these are now available. We have inspected the waste management service and assessed it as providing a fair one star service with promising prospects for improvement. Whilst the Council's refuse collection is effective and scores a very high level of satisfaction, the service remains amongst the 25 per cent most costly of district councils. The Council has improved its performance on recycling and there is now a kerbside recycling collection from all properties in the district. In addition, garden waste collection is being extended to 20,000 properties, and this waste is being composted by a local farmer.
- 30 The Council's priority on youth includes grant assistance to a number of projects for example the opening of a skateboard park in the centre of Selby which is well used.
- 31 Successful partnership working is starting to bring benefits for residents. For example, joint work with the county is resulting in the opening of a community office in Sherburn in Elmet from which local residents will now be able to access a range of district services. The 'partnership for older people' project aims to reduce hospital admissions amongst the elderly. This is one of a number of health projects which the Council supports through the jointly appointed (council/PCT) health improvement manager, including initiatives on drug and alcohol abuse. Considerable officer time is being invested in exploring alternative methods of service delivery with two neighbouring authorities.

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- 32** The Council has accessed significant funds to support its improvement priorities. The Council agreed an improvement plan to address the weaknesses identified in the CPA report and on the basis of this plan, has successfully bid to ODPM for over £200,000 of capacity building funds. Weaknesses in management capacity are being addressed through a review of senior management structure and competence. It is the Council's intention to make SMT more strategic and less operational, partly through the introduction of a tier of service heads below SMT, and this change will take place over the coming months. Once this review is complete it is intended to roll out an updated programme of management development.
- 33** The Council has considerable success in bringing investment into the district. Yorkshire Forward is investing £5 million over three years to support the 'Renaissance' project which aims to regenerate the three market towns of Selby, Tadcaster and Sherburn. This is a key priority for the Council, and consultants are currently engaged in developing the detailed plans for each of the three towns. The North Yorkshire wide Community Investment Prospectus (CIP) initiative, funded by single regeneration budget (SRB), has accessed £1.2 million for projects put forward by the six Selby CIPs. These range from provision of seating and play areas to CCTV schemes.
- 34** The bid from Selby's crime and disorder partnership for 'Safer and Stronger Communities' funding was regarded by Government Office as the strongest from the North Yorkshire districts. The Council has successfully lobbied for the funding of procurement experts to work specifically with district councils by the regional centre of excellence, and Selby has a procurement 'buddy' arrangement with an excellent council in the region. The Council is investing its planning delivery grant this year in the improvement of the IT in the planning department to speed up the processing of planning applications. The Council is also investing in diversity training for all its staff and members.
- 35** Selby has prepared well for delivery of the targets on e-Government. There remains a significant challenge to actually deliver the ambitious programme of work, especially in relation to managing organisational and process change.

In the light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?

- 36 The Council recognises the need to change and learn from others and has started to make progress with future plans. The Council was surprised and disappointed by its CPA 2004 score. Self-awareness has grown through the process of developing its improvement plan, submitting its bid for capacity building funds, and subsequently through an increasing range of interactions with external agencies supporting the change process. There is still too much focus within the Council on process rather than outcomes, and on obstacles to improvement. The Council has a culture of identifying reasons for why things can't be done – for example, financial constraints and recruitment difficulties. However, the Council's self-assessment for this progress assessment recognises the need to change organisational culture.
- 37 The Council has learned from CPA that it needs to prioritise and then focus on its priorities. An exercise has been undertaken to assess the Council's capacity to deliver its priorities, and to stop doing things which are not priorities. The Council has also learned from other councils in the form of mentors, and through visits and exchanges. Its awareness that its future may lie in community leadership and commissioning services rather than providing them, puts it in advance of many other authorities. The work already done with the CIPS, and in developing service partnerships, puts the Council in a strong position to develop these roles.
- 38 Growing self-awareness has also led to a greater openness internally within the authority, and more willingness to encourage managers to put forward their views. The managers' forum and conferences are used to keep managers up-to-date with the Council's improvement plans, and give them the opportunity to contribute their ideas.
- 39 The Council has started to make progress with future plans. The launch of the new community strategy and new community safety strategy are two key future plans. The current exercise to develop the underpinning action plans for the community strategy will take this to the next stage. The development of the Council's ten-year vision has been a significant step forward. The new corporate plan setting out the Council's priorities is only a one-year document. The Council does not have a three to five-year plan, with supporting service, financial and workforce plans.
- 40 Since CPA 2004 the Selby local plan has been adopted, and the Council's housing strategy was the first in North Yorkshire to be designated as fit for purpose. The Council does not, however, have a waste minimisation strategy, an affordable housing strategy, and detailed plans for its 'Renaissance' strategy, which would assist with the implementation of its other key priorities, are currently being drawn up by Yorkshire Forward.

Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State of area address reflects a coherence of direction. • Political leadership has strengthened and gives direction to the Council. • Consultation with stakeholders. • Active support for community development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambition is not explicit with confusion between mission statements and vision. • Political priorities have not been translated into a clear set of priorities for the Council. • The Council is not providing community leadership through the LSP.
Focus	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service focus, eg in housing benefits, development control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity on priorities leads to lack of focus on the big picture. Mechanisms and tools do not allow focus on priorities.
Prioritisation	2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of sets of priorities has led to confusion, without SMART targets, and resources not clearly aligned to priorities.

CPA Progress Assessment Report | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004 **15**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Capacity	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is aware of capacity issues in key areas and is taking steps to remedy them, consultants, retention strategy. • Effective management of staffing resources through use of HR eg sickness absence, in best quartile. • Competent officers. • Financial capacity and level of reserves sufficient. • Use partnerships to enhance capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers are not being pushed to achieve against priorities and targets other than PIs. • Underdeveloped strategic direction at SMT level.
Performance management	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a risk management strategy, which is being developed. • Performance management culture is embedded in services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview and scrutiny do not look at performance across the Council. • The Council does not have an explicit framework, which identifies how performance is managed in the Council and current processes are over-complicated.

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Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement in quality of service	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some key services in top quartile, recycling, invoices paid on time, days lost through sickness, EH best practice, re-let times. Some specific achievements. Recent user surveys indicate high levels of satisfaction – tenants, market traders, one-stop shop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sixty-nine per cent of BVPIs below average in 2002/03. Little evidence that the Council is achieving a high level of quality in its priority areas. Council regards achievement as input rather than impact.
Achievement of improvement	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents and tenants acknowledge some improvement in local services. Improvement in recycling, benefits, planning PIs, website transactions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forty-three per cent of key PIs have not improved in 2002/03. Crime levels increasing against the national trends. Improvements are service-based, not driven by priorities.
Investment	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council has identified the need for a co-ordinated approach to investment. Some evidence of progress in key areas, HR, PFI, IT, community engagement. Process for reviewing service planning. Effective budget management and control. Open to external challenge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited progress in other key areas, community safety, overview and scrutiny, procurement. Corporate change (Agenda for Change) is in the early stage of development but not yet comprehensive or robust. The Council does not have a robust medium-term financial strategy that is linked to priorities.

CPA Progress Assessment Report | Appendix 1 – Summary of theme scores
and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance
Assessment in 2004 **17**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of use of inspections and performance failure to revamp systems, using visits and consultants to implement change. • Systematic opportunities to promote shared learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited self-awareness of impact of Council's actions and associated solutions. • The Council is inconsistent in the way it evaluates.
Future plans	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have all necessary statutory plans, with signs of improvement in content and focus. • Evidence of good consultation and engagement with the community on plans. • There are some action plans linked with strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have no long-term plan, and other general statements in corporate plan and community strategy do not give medium-term plans. • Action plans are not SMART. • Lack of future plans are a constraint on tackling future achievement.

Scoring key

1 – Weak

2 – Weaknesses outweigh strengths

3 – Strengths outweigh weaknesses

4 – Strong

Appendix 2 – Progress monitoring against the findings of the Comprehensive Performance

- 1 The original comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999 and published in 2004.
- 2 Under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 ('the Act'), best value authorities have a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions, having regard to the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. By virtue of sections 10 and 13 of the Act, the Audit Commission may carry out inspection activity to ensure that a best value authority is complying with this duty, and may issue a report as to its findings. This progress monitoring activity and reporting to assess improvement falls within sections 3, 10 and 13.
- 3 The main elements of this progress monitoring report were collation and analysis of evidence from:
 - self-assessments of progress made, completed by the Council;
 - appointed auditor evidence from performance and financial audit activity;
 - audited performance indicators, inspection reports and plan assessments;
 - reviews of key corporate documents including performance reports, committee papers and management reports; and
 - observations and interviews with managers, staff and partner organisations.
- 4 This progress monitoring report for Selby District Council was collated by the Audit Commission and reflects evidence gathered over the period from January 2004 to April 2005.
- 5 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for reporting progress to the Project Board and updating and improving the Improvement Plan as appropriate.