

CPA Progress Assessment

23 June 2005



# CPA Progress Assessment

**Watford Borough 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'.

Those councils classified as 'poorly performing'<sup>1</sup>, were the subject of formal engagement by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), and were required to produce a recovery/improvement plan following their CPA. Through its network of relationship managers, the Commission worked closely with the lead officials assigned by the ODPM in developing an appropriate monitoring programme for the recovery/improvement plan.

The progress assessment will measure the impact and sustainability of the council's improvement activity. Where necessary, it will report on regress. The progress assessment is tailored to local circumstances, provides appropriate public assurance and contributes to improvement reporting. It will report an evidence based judgement on progress against the original corporate assessment criteria, but it will not give 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Poorly performing' is defined as councils that were classified as 'poor' or 'weak' with a corporate assessment score of 1.

## Introduction

- 1 In May 2004, the Audit Commission published a Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Watford Borough 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 Watford is progressing well in priority areas and is taking effective action to deliver future improvement. Although performance does not compare well based on audited performance indicators for 2003/04, unaudited data for 2004/05 shows a positive improvement trend.
- 4 The Council has concentrated on short-term priorities which are based on consultation and an understanding about what matters most to communities. Work is now progressing with a reformed local strategic partnership (LSP) to further develop a longer-term vision and ambitions for the area. The Council is demonstrating community leadership and actively engaging communities to achieve social cohesion.
- 5 The Council has continued to sustain improvement based on the firm foundation of strong leadership and management. The Council has adopted a twin track approach to improvement. It has targeted some worst performing services and invested in developing internal capacity and systems to help deliver more consistent and sustained improvement in the future. Improved performance management and the use of external skills have helped to maintain focus on the improvement plan 'Transforming Watford'.
- 6 Overall performance as measured by best value performance indicators still does not compare well with other councils, although the improvement trend is positive. Public satisfaction is also improving. The Council has improved its worst performing services such as planning and revenues and benefits. This has not distracted from other priorities. For example, kerbside recycling has been extended and recycling performance is amongst that of the best councils. Access to services and information has been significantly improved through the opening of the customer service centre and provision of a new and effective website. The Council is taking action to achieve future improvement. For example, it is exploring options with neighbouring councils for the provision of joint leisure facilities and money has been earmarked to improve leisure facilities.
- 7 The Council is aware of the challenges it faces to deliver its ambitions for Watford. Although costs have been significantly reduced, the Council remains a high-spending authority. Difficult decisions remain to be taken to achieve its medium-term financial strategy. Performance management, risk management and human resource management have improved but are not yet consistently applied to help deliver sustained improvement. The scrutiny function is not making an effective contribution to future developments. It is positive that the Council is aware of these issues and remains open to external challenge and is acting on this to develop plans to help enable future improvement.

- 8 It is recommended that the Council:
- actively and promptly shares this progress assessment with staff;
  - takes it to an appropriate public committee meeting; and
  - use this progress assessment in conjunction with findings from underpinning work to continue to feed into improvement planning, alongside advice from the Improvement Panel.

## Context

### The locality

- 9 The borough of Watford is located in the west of Hertfordshire. It is predominantly an urban area with some open spaces. The borough is compact and covers an area of only 8.3 square miles. Communication links are good. Watford is close to the M1 motorway, with the London Glasgow rail route and London Underground, passing through the Borough. London is twenty minutes away by train.
- 10 The town centre is the key focal point of the borough. It is the site of a major regional shopping complex and has a thriving nightlife. Watford is also the home of Watford Football Club and Saracens Rugby Union Football Club. Watford is becoming increasingly popular as a site for film locations and for arts and entertainment festivals.
- 11 The population of Watford is approximately 79,700, with around 14 per cent of people from ethnic community groups, compared with the national average of 8.7 per cent. Watford is mainly a small business economy. Unemployment is 1.8 per cent compared to the national average of 2.7 per cent. Watford is a relatively prosperous town and is ranked as the 225th most deprived district out of 354 nationally.

### The Council

- 12 Watford was a Labour controlled authority for 30 years until 2002, when the Liberal Democratic Party won control. The Liberal Democrat majority was increased in May 2004 and the Council now consists of: 28 Liberal Democrats including the elected Mayor, 4 Conservatives, 3 Labour, 2 Green Party. The Council is led by an elected Mayor. The Mayor leads a cabinet comprising four portfolio holders. There are two scrutiny committees: call-in and performance and Policy development. Each is chaired by an opposition Councillor. In addition, there are four other committees: planning, licensing, functions, standards.
- 13 The Borough faces considerable challenges concerning the quality, management and delivery of its services and in recent years has received much criticism from external agencies. This included a very critical capacity inspection carried out by the Audit Commission in May 2002. A follow-up report in November 2003 found that the Council had made progress in a number of areas, in particular at the corporate level. The CPA in May 2004 recognised that improvement was being maintained and the Council was assessed as 'Weak'.
- 14 The Council has been through a transitional phase as it sought to improve efficiency and quality in its services. A senior management restructuring was completed in 2004 and the staff are now led by a management board comprising a managing director (who took up post in August 2003), two corporate directors and a director of finance. In addition, there are 11 heads of services. At the end of 2004/05 the Council employed 604 staff (FTE's).

- 15 Budgeted expenditure for 2004/5 is £73.68 million, with a net expenditure of £13.87 million. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) expenditure for 2004/05 is £24.29 million with HRA income at £12.07 million. The Council's capital programme for 2004/05 is £6.43 million from the general fund, £6.12 million from the receipts from the sales of Council homes and £3.09 million from major repairs allowance (MRA). At 31 March 2004, the general fund balance stood at £1.925 million, and housing revenue account balance at £0.567 million. Council tax in Watford is the highest in Hertfordshire. The Council maintains just under 5,000 properties.

## What is the Council trying to achieve?

- 16 The Council has strong ambitions for Watford and has improved focus on the delivery of priorities.
- 17 The Council has firm ambitions for the longer-term, although these are not set out in a coherent, well understood plan. Options currently being assessed for the 15 to 20-year development of the town centre are based on a vision established through consultation with stakeholders and analysis of future needs. The Council is working with partners to establish a master plan for the health campus. Following extensive consultation, the Council has agreed plans for the redevelopment of Charter Place and has incorporated plans for a Civic quarter into a wider town centre study. The Council is working with partners to improve the quality of life over the longer-term.
- 18 The Council is working with the reformed LSP to build on work already undertaken and crystallise a shared vision for the area. The partnership aims to produce a new community strategy to provide a focus for partners in contributing to the delivery of improvements for residents.
- 19 The overarching ambition 'A better Council, a better Watford' recognises that the Council needs to improve itself in order to improve services for local people. The six medium-term objectives underpin this ambition are:
  - changing the culture of the Council;
  - ensuring statutory services are delivered to a high standard with demonstrable improvement in areas of weakness;
  - delivering value for money - reducing Council tax and staffing levels;
  - improving services contributing to cleaner, smarter, safer town;
  - promoting sustainability; and
  - implementing cultural strategy.
- 20 The 'Transforming Watford' programme effectively supports the delivery of these objectives and sets out priorities for improvement. This is a phased and realistic change programme focussing on public facing services such as recycling, planning and revenues and benefits alongside internal improvements such as culture change and ICT systems. This recognises the need to improve internal capacity and culture to enable the sustained improvement of services. The programme also prioritises the improvement of public facing services in accordance with the views of residents, partners and customers. For example, indoor leisure has been prioritised in response to resident feedback and the need to reduce running costs.

- 21 Senior Councillors and officers continue to provide strong leadership and effective focus on improvement. Councillors and managers understand the Council's priorities and there is good staff awareness. This has been achieved through effective communication via internet, newsletters and briefings. This has contributed to improved focus on improvement during a period of considerable change.
- 22 Councillors and staff demonstrate commitment to user focus and improvement. This is evident in developments in cultural services which address community needs and have been informed by extensive consultation. Consequently, the Council provides a wide range of targeted services.
- 23 The Council has demonstrated an improved ability to focus on the delivery of priorities. Improvements in capacity and performance management coupled with clear direction from the mayor and managing director have contributed to improvements in priority services such as planning and recycling. Unforeseen events such as the liquidation of the company that ran the Colosseum venue have not distracted from the delivery of objectives. This means the Council is not being diverted from delivering improvement priorities.
- 24 Ambitions for the area are not consistently supported by robust targets and strategies. This is because a number of drivers for change have resulted in different documents and strategies each of which express ambitions and aims. These are not 'joined-up'. For example, the priorities in the three-year improvement plan for cultural services differ from those in the cultural strategy. The Council is addressing this issue.

## How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?

- 25 The Council has improved capacity and made some progress in improving performance management.
- 26 The Council has taken effective action to improve staff capacity. New appointments have been made to key management posts and targeted training and development is contributing to an improvement in services. For example, the Council has successfully recruited to the customer service centre and staff have received customer care training. Improved recruitment and retention has contributed to improvements in priority services, such as development control.
- 27 The Council has recognised where additional skills are needed and taken action to ensure this does not impede progress. For example, external consultants have been used to project manage components of the change management programme and this has contributed to the achievement of targets notably the completion and opening of the customer contact centre.
- 28 The Council has made progress in bolstering capacity through external funding and exploring new ways of delivering services. For example, the Council obtained £900,000 from the ODPM for the delivery of the service transformation programme. Alternative service delivery options are progressing. This includes the externalisation of building services and the use of external partners to develop ICT systems. This has helped to accelerate the pace of change.
- 29 The Council has continued to build on sound partnership working. The Council is working with neighbouring councils on the feasibility of providing joint leisure facilities. LSP partners are working with the Council to develop a vision for Watford for the next 15 years. Close working with the police has resulted in the Home Office award of 'Together Action Area' status, which recognises improvements in the approach against anti-social behaviour. Although relationships are strong the impact of partnerships is not consistently assessed. For example, the Council cannot show the impact of its work on health issues. Partnership working is helping to address community needs and deliver improvements, but the impact of this activity is not always identified.
- 30 Although costs are still high, action has been taken to improve value for money. Better procurement has generated savings of £120,000. A more strategic approach to the use of property assets has generated £1.2 million in 2004/05. The Council has met the Gershon efficiency target. This has enabled the Council to achieve its aim of setting the lowest Council tax increase in Hertfordshire for the third consecutive year.

- 31** There has been improvement to performance management although this is not consistently driving improvement in all areas. Performance reporting is clear, and targets are now more realistic. Detailed quarterly performance reviews involve senior officers and members. If performance is not on track for individual performance indicators, an individual action plan is developed. However, the quality of performance information and management is not consistent. For example, the quality of service planning varies considerably. Some focus on actions rather than outcomes which makes it difficult to monitor progress. The approach to target setting is mixed and does not consistently involve the appropriate staff. The culture of performance management is developing with many staff focussed on performance improvement. More effective performance management is contributing to improved performance in some services.
- 32** Scrutiny is under developed and not effective. Call-in and performance scrutiny committee duplicates the work of cabinet when examining performance information. Consequently, opportunities are missed for more in-depth performance examination and a broader contribution to improvement. The Council recognises this and is considering the future role of scrutiny.
- 33** The Council has high sickness levels but has taken action to address long-term sickness. In 2003/04 sickness levels were amongst the worst nationally at 14.9 days per member of staff. Over the last year the number of people sick for more than 20 days has reduced from 94 to 10. The Council is developing its approach for the effective management of shorter-term sickness. High sickness levels reduce the Council's capacity for improvement.
- 34** Human resource management has improved but is not consistent. The human resources team have by necessity concentrated on immediate issues such as the reduction in staffing levels, and have successfully stemmed the flow of employment tribunals. However, the human resources team does not have the capacity to develop core HR systems. For example, the Council is yet to develop a workforce plan and a corporate training programme is not in place. The Council is aware of these issues and is currently recruiting HR staff.

## What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?

- 35 Improvement has been achieved in priority services and action is being taken to enable further improvement. Although performance does not compare well based on audited performance indicators for 2003/04, unaudited data for 2004/05 shows a positive improvement trend.
- 36 In 2002/03, 62 per cent of Council indicators were below average. The position changed little in 2003/4 with 61 per cent remaining below average. Although comparative performance in these periods is unimpressive, more recent information shows a more positive picture of improvement. Between 2002/03 and 2003/04, 42 per cent of indicators (excluding satisfaction indicators) improved. Unaudited information shows improvement in 62 per cent of indicators between 2003/04 and 2004/05.
- 37 Satisfaction with Council services is improving. The Council's most recent information shows improvement in customer satisfaction between 2003 and 2004. Unaudited community survey results show:
- overall satisfaction with the Council has increased from 49 per cent in 2003 to 65 per cent in 2004;
  - overall satisfaction with cleanliness has increased from 50 per cent to 57 per cent;
  - satisfaction with recycling facilities increased from 56 per cent to 62 per cent;
  - satisfaction with complaint handling increased from 38 per cent to 50 per cent; and
  - satisfaction with the helpfulness of Council staff increased from 61 per cent to 89 per cent.
- 38 The Council has been successful in improving previously poorly performing priority services. The Council's most recent unaudited data shows that the speed of processing planning applications has increased significantly. For example, 77 per cent of minor applications determined in eight weeks in 2004/05 compared to 48 per cent in 2003/04, 76 per cent of major applications determined in 13 weeks (2004/05) compared to 30 per cent in 2003/04. Improvements have been made in the revenue and benefits, which is a Council priority. The Council's most recent unaudited data shows improvement in eight out of ten indicators between 2003/4 and 2004/5. This includes the speed of processing new claims which has reduced from 50 days to 40 days, and a reduction in the average time for processing change in circumstances from 22 days to 18 days. An automated 24-hour payment line has recently been introduced enabling customers to pay housing rent and council tax more easily.

- 39 Improvements have been achieved in the priority area of improving the environment. Kerbside recycling has been extended and best quartile performance achieved in 2003/04, exceeding government targets. Indications are that improvement has continued in 2004/05. However, the Council has not reduced the volume of waste collected, although the rate of growth has reduced. Seven days a week street cleansing has been established to improve the appearance of the town.
- 40 The Council has not improved some services. Although not identified as a priority for improvement the majority of housing performance indicators remain below average. Although there is improvement, some user satisfaction levels are low in comparison to others. For example, satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities is 51 per cent compared to an average of 55 per cent.
- 41 The Council is working effectively to improve the quality of life for communities. It is working well on diversity issues and is actively engaging communities to achieve social cohesion. For example, the Multi Agency Active Communities (MAAC) project has established activities and training to enable participation by black and minority ethnic women in physical activities. This is targeted at Asian and African Caribbean women and their families because of the previous lack of participation and high incidence of poor health. Activities provided for Muslim women are proving successful and this has in turn increased the use of community centres. The Council website is easy to navigate and includes information in different languages.
- 42 The Council has increased the range of activities available for young people, for example by opening a BMX track and skateboard park in the town centre. There are nine youth clubs operating across the borough and a range of additional targeted projects. The Watford Youth Council provides empowerment to young people to allow them to shape and develop the service. There is also effective dialogue and involvement of young people who use informal activities, outside the youth clubs. This has led to the provision of youth shelters and the skate park for casual activities.
- 43 Levels of crime remain high when compared to other councils. All nine community safety indicators are in the bottom two quartiles, with improvement (in terms of less reported crime) in only three of these. However, these figures need to be treated with some caution because Hertfordshire is one of the first areas to implement a new crime recording methodology. This has inflated figures. When compared to its Home Office group of similar towns, crime levels are generally lower.

**16 CPA Progress Assessment | What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?**

- 44** The Council recognises it needs to make further improvements in services and is taking action. The Council is exploring the provision of joint leisure facilities with neighbouring councils and is seeking bids for the provision of new facilities in accordance with its needs analysis and in response to low user satisfaction. The Cabinet has recently agreed to allocate £21 million for new leisure facilities. A second 'hot spot' team has been set up to tackle litter and graffiti and street cleansing has been extended to seven days a week. The Council has completed its stock option appraisal and will ballot tenants in 2006. The proportion of non-decent homes has been reduced to 25 per cent and the housing capital programme has been reshaped with the aim of meeting the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.
- 45** The Council has continued to invest to improve internal services and management in order to provide a platform for the improvement of public facing services. Investment in ICT in conjunction with the programme of business process re-engineering underpins future service improvement. Improved human resource management has begun to reduce long-term sickness. The complaints process has been reviewed and a complaints officer appointed. Indications are that satisfaction with complaints handling is improving.
- 46** A number of other investments remain to be achieved. For example risk management is not embedded. Some building blocks, such as the medium-term financial strategy require further development to focus on priorities. Key HR approaches such as a workforce development plan and a corporate training programme are not in place and the Council does not yet have a corporate approach to project management.

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

- 47 The Council shows good self-awareness and learning informs future plans.
- 48 The approach to learning continues to be strengthened. Over the last year the Council has introduced *lunch and learn* sessions for staff which has enabled staff to learn about a variety of HR approaches and procedures. The staff improvement forum provides the opportunity for staff representing all service areas to provide feedback on key issues. Feedback from staff is positive and this has contributed to improved focus and understanding.
- 49 The Council is receptive to external and internal challenge. It has learned from approaches developed by other councils such as performance management at Elmbridge. External consultants have undertaken key reviews such as the review of Building Services in order to inject challenge. This has contributed to the decision to externalise the service in order to deliver improvement for users.
- 50 The Council is acting on learning. As a result of the best value review of Building Services staff are trained to be multi-skilled to help ensure a job can be completed more efficiently. The recommendations made in a best value review of cultural services two years ago have been acted upon and this has contributed to improved services.
- 51 Although there have been some improvements, the quality of plans varies and the Council's planning framework is not fully developed. In cultural services there are effective improvement plans which include proposed actions, milestones and priority levels. This has helped to target work, for example, to tackle obesity in young people. However, the leisure and community services training plan for 2004/05 lacks defined outcome targets. Timescales and costs are generally not identified. More importantly, there is no indication of what is expected from the training. This means the Council does not have comprehensive plans to help deliver improvement.
- 52 There is good work being undertaken on revising and updating individual strategies. Within the leisure and community services, a range of strategies are being developed. These include; an open spaces strategy, children and young people's strategy, museum and arts strategy. Although strategies are not yet fully aligned they are helping the Council deliver its service objectives.
- 53 Although there has been some improvement in future plans, with the IEG4 statement accepted by ODPM, the Council's planning framework is not yet fully developed. For example, the community strategy has not effectively progressed and the performance plan does not effectively address Council priorities. This means the Council does not have comprehensive plans in place to guide the delivery of ambitions.

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

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ambition	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong and realistic vision and ambitions.</li> <li>• Vision is consistent through range of documents including the community plan.</li> <li>• Widespread ownership of ambitions, internally and externally with the LSP.</li> <li>• Strong political and officer leadership.</li> <li>• Strong ambitions in areas of waste, town centre, community safety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambitions do not have a consistent long-term horizon.</li> <li>• Robustness of vision and ambitions is varied in some service plans, eg targets not always measurable.</li> </ul>

CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in May 2004 19

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Prioritisation	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six clear medium-term priorities linking to vision.</li> <li>• Priorities clearly linked to consultation, citizen and user feedback.</li> <li>• Priorities communicated and owned.</li> <li>• Diverse community needs reflected in priorities.</li> <li>• Resources moved from lower priority to priority areas.</li> <li>• Local priorities reflect national priorities eg waste management, community safety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routine service user information not analysed corporately.</li> <li>• Lack of non-user information, particularly young people.</li> <li>• Website not used effectively.</li> </ul>
Focus	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of internal focus.</li> <li>• Focus maintained on community safety.</li> <li>• Some mechanisms in place to assist in focus, eg agenda management, portfolio arrangements.</li> <li>• Emerging customer focus.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of track record in delivering priorities over a sustained period.</li> <li>• Historic weaknesses in HR have hindered focus on service delivery.</li> <li>• Mechanisms for focus have been put in place very recently and are not yet embedded.</li> <li>• Information is not yet used effectively to maintain focus across a range of services.</li> </ul>

**20 CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in May 2004**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Capacity	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members and officers are clear about roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>• Mutual respect between officers and members.</li> <li>• Good use of partnerships with positive outcomes.</li> <li>• Standards committee is pro-active.</li> <li>• Good calibre senior managers.</li> <li>• Positive approach to issues of diversity in the workforce.</li> <li>• External funding accessed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant skills gaps in the workforce.</li> <li>• Skills audit not yet undertaken.</li> <li>• High levels of sickness.</li> <li>• Issues around middle managers' skills to effectively manage performance.</li> <li>• High levels of employment tribunals.</li> <li>• Problems in recruiting to some areas.</li> <li>• Use of private sector not fully explored.</li> <li>• Some weaknesses in key support functions eg IT, procurement.</li> <li>• DA assessed financial standing as weak.</li> </ul>
Performance management	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Milestones and targets in place against priorities.</li> <li>• Members and officers making increasing use of performance data.</li> <li>• Performance review system links high level objectives to staff targets.</li> <li>• Focus on reducing costs.</li> <li>• Financial systems improving.</li> <li>• Good performance management in some services, eg community services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed robustness of targets in priority areas.</li> <li>• Performance management is not yet driving service improvement corporately.</li> <li>• Tools to monitor achievement are not yet embedded.</li> <li>• Overall risk management is weak.</li> <li>• No corporate approach to VFM.</li> <li>• Inconsistent approach to service standards.</li> </ul>

CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in May 2004 **21**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Achievement in quality of service	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good user satisfaction in some priority areas, eg tenants</li> <li>• Sound performance in some priority areas, eg street cleaning; community safety.</li> <li>• Range of good quality projects delivered.</li> <li>• External accreditation for some services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PI's are weak.</li> <li>• Overall, low public satisfaction.</li> <li>• Development control is weak.</li> <li>• Benefits performance is 'fair'.</li> <li>• Four best value inspections all fair.</li> <li>• Weaknesses in housing performance.</li> </ul>
Achievement of improvement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement in some priority areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- community safety;</li> <li>- recycling;</li> <li>- town centre issues; and</li> <li>- street cleaning.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little improvement in PI's.</li> <li>• No step change or consistent improvement across services.</li> <li>• Overall public satisfaction levels remain low.</li> <li>• Some key areas show insufficient improvement eg some elements of housing benefits.</li> <li>• Failure to meet targets in some areas eg voids <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in some cases worsening performance.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**22 CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in May 2004**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Investment	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective management restructuring.</li> <li>• Significant investment in areas of weakness eg IT, procurement.</li> <li>• Comprehensive approach to putting building blocks in place.</li> <li>• Improving financial base and reviewing capital base and using as an asset.</li> <li>• Performance management resources secured from IDeA.</li> <li>• External resources secured.</li> <li>• Investors in People achieved in over half of service areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some building blocks are relatively new and untested.</li> <li>• Scrutiny function is not yet effective.</li> <li>• Lack of investment in some areas: MTFP, Risk Management.</li> </ul>
Learning	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council is highly self-aware of strengths and weaknesses.</li> <li>• Changes have resulted from learning.</li> <li>• The Council looks to learn from others.</li> <li>• Staff are encouraged to develop new ideas.</li> <li>• The Council opens itself to external challenge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning not systematically shared across the Council.</li> <li>• Impact of learning yet to work its way through to some service areas.</li> </ul>

CPA Progress Assessment | Appendix 1 - Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses as reported in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in May 2004 **23**

Theme	Grade	Strengths	Weaknesses
Future plans	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statutory plans are in place.</li> <li>• Strategic plans are in place and look robust eg community plan, improvement plan.</li> <li>• Asset management and capital strategy assessed as good.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak IEG plan.</li> <li>• DHS action plan is weak.</li> <li>• There are some potential inconsistencies in plans to deliver priorities.</li> <li>• Capacity and resources to deliver future plans are uncertain.</li> </ul>

**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 Assessment

- 54 The original comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999 and published in 2004.
- 55 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.
- 56 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, interviews and focus groups with managers, staff, customers and partner organisations.
- 57 This progress monitoring report for Watford Borough Council was collated by the Audit Commission and reflects evidence gathered over the period from May 2004 to May 2005.
- 58 This report has been discussed with the Council, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment.